

Unity

VBC
Paul Ramey
November 22-23, 2003
Psalm 133

“Life Together – It Doesn’t Get Any Better Than This”

Recap on the last few weeks in James.

Read Passage: *Psalm 133*

So now we come to this idea of unity. What does God want to say to us tonight about unity? As we'll see, this issue of unity is so close to God's heart. But what usually makes the papers in regards to churches and the kingdom of God is when believers don't get along, when we fight. And there's nothing that makes the father happier than when his kids, his children have a harmonious spirit with the family in which they have been born. If God is glorified greatly when believers love each other, we need to dig in to what unity is all about.

So let's really capture what the Psalmist is talking about. He tells us that when brothers and sisters are together in unity it is good and pleasant. **Good (Tob)** - *beautiful, better, best*. The word carries the idea that it is better than anything...that it is ultimate. That it is a beautiful thing. Something to be cherished. And it is **pleasant (naim)** - delightful, surpassing in beauty. Notice the exclamation point in your bible. The Psalmist is excited about this! He is passionate about this. Why? Well, let's look at that for just a moment. This particular Psalm is called a **Psalm of Ascent**. What is that? It was a song the pilgrim Israelites would sing on their way up to Jerusalem (Mt. Zion) where they would worship together during Festivals. It was a song of celebration. **And so the Psalmist takes V.1 and begins to try to explain** how amazing unity among brothers and sisters is. At that point he begins to describe and define unity. In a sense, he knows that it is not good enough to just tell us that it is amazing...that it is "good and pleasant", but that, in order for it to connect, **a picture needs to be drawn to help the reader** begin to understand more of the surpassing beauty of unity.

READ V.2:

Oil?! Maybe you're saying, "Oil?! What in the world does oil have to do with unity? I put it in my car! It keeps my chicken from sticking to the pan. It helps me fry my taco shells. What could it have to do with unity?"

Let's think about this for a moment, though, in context. In **that day it was customary for hosts to anoint guests with oil** when they would come into the

house. The climate the writer is in is a very hot, arid, dry climate. So what would oil do in that kind of climate? It would refresh dry skin. It would sooth. After a hot, dirty day of being pounded by the sun, oil would take on a very refreshing, invigorating, healing, cosmetic aspect. This would be an experience to remember, to look forward to, to talk about...oil being poured on the head, running down the beard.

So what is he saying? He is saying that unity is like that experience. He is using this great experience to define unity. But he goes on...

He then paints on the canvas this very familiar picture to these Jews. The picture of the High Priest who is being anointed. This is the picture of the consecration of the priest who would be the very representation of God to the Israelites. It's a picture of oil flowing, anointing happening, God's presence coming. **Essentially, he is equating unity to the very presence of God.** What a picture! In context, we begin to see just a glimpse of the beauty of unity. But he dares to go on. **He then changes the illustration of unity to another setting.** He likens unity to the dew of Mt. Hermon, one of the highest points in Palestine and where the dew would be the thickest in all the land, descending upon the hot, arid and dry Mt. Zion, the place where they were traveling to worship. The thickest dew in the driest place. In a sense he is saying, "It's life." Unity is like life to those who have it **"It doesn't get any better than this."**

So what is the Psalmist getting at here? He takes two examples or illustrations of what he would consider ultimate experiences to help us get an accurate picture of what unity looks like. You can almost picture him writing, recounting one ultimate experience and topping it with another (animate this out and expand on it).

I mean...let's contextualize this a little bit and bring it to our own culture today. (CALL ON STAGED EXAMPLES OF ULTIMATE EXPERIENCES) (Rob F,)

ILLUSRATION: 1st ultimate experience. Seattle Seahawks game against the Raiders 2 years ago at Husky Stadium. Sean Alexander scores 5 times. With my brothers and father.

2nd ultimate experience: sitting at in-laws house on hot day with Ice Tea and the "misters."

You can see David building up unity, selling us on the wonder of it, the ultimate experience... and as he does he moves in out between the natural pleasures and experiences into the spiritual pleasures and experiences (EXPAND ON THIS...). To him there is no separation between the two. **Ours is one of the only cultures that actually does separate the two.** But he is saying that unity connects with all parts of life. It is not just a Saturday/Sunday, "pull it out on the way to church" kind of thing. It is a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday thing as well.

So...UNITY! The Psalmist is saying "It is great! It's beautiful, it is healing, it is refreshing, there's nothing like it, it is the ultimate in life." So what do we do with that? Is this passage an end to itself? Are we supposed to read it, study it, tear it apart like we have and say "That's nice. I'm glad I know more about unity." Or is the Psalmist getting at something greater here? What was his goal in writing this?

Illustration: Starbucks Extra Hot 5 Pump Vanilla Latte. *Explain Ingredients. I have not talked to Mr. Starbucks yet, but I would be willing to guess that when they made this drink, the idea wasn't that a bunch of people would gather around a table and extol the ingredients of the tall, extra hot, 5 pump vanilla latte. I think the plan was that you would go buy one and do this (drink the latte).

I believe that, tonight, God wants us to dive into unity. He wants us to inject unity. He wants us to clothe ourselves with unity. But as opposed to a Starbucks drink that is a mere \$3, unity doesn't come cheap. **It comes with a price.** It will cost us. Faithfulness, Loyalty, patience, love, tenacity, perseverance, grace, forgiveness and probably most of all ... HUMILITY. You see, the Bible is so connected and every word of it makes sense and means something. **Psalms 133 is making the same point that is ultimately made in James.** Humble yourselves, for it is in humility where the blessing awaits us. The blessing of life. The blessing of grace. The blessing of restoration (humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up). The cost is high. Commitment and resolve is essential. But the blessing is great.

One blessing we can highlight is found in John 17 when Jesus is praying to the Father before he ultimately goes to the cross. Think about it. He's going to the cross. He could have prayed many many things. But as he sums up all that he is asking the Father, this is what he prays: **V. 20-23.** Wow! "So that the world may know..." **According to Jesus, unity SOFTENS THE HEARTS OF UNBELIEVERS.** There is a watching world that is waiting for the church to love each other. **Our love for each other IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD in the world we live in.** That's what David was getting at and that's what Jesus was saying.

If I can honestly speak for my generation for a minute. My generation is one that has craved for, searched for, longed for, cried for...community. It's what everyone wants. **Compaionship, affirmation, security, worth, acceptance, love.** Many of them belong to broken homes and families. **WE'RE DRY. WE NEED DEW. WE NEED OIL.** And so maybe you're wondering why so many of them have leaned towards **SPIRITUALISM than Christianity.** Why their purpose in life is now to obtain maximum satisfaction. To live in peace and harmony with each other and with the world, with nature. Why they have turned to truth in alternate consciousness, transcendental meditation, pyramids, acupuncture, new age music, magic, witchcraft, visualization, drugs, out of body experiences, channeling, telepathy, organic food, martial arts, inner feelings and

on and on. **For many in my generation, it is because they have been to church, but did not see the church truly loving each other.**

But let me also speak TO my generation and say that most of us long for community -- but aren't willing to take the risks and pay the price for it. We're not willing to do what it takes to gain it. But we LONG for it!

And we need the older generations! We need you to pour into us! We need you to feed us! We need to you give what you have! **Older women...**the younger women desperately need you in this church! Without you they are falling and they need your experience, your wisdom. Maybe you don't think you have anything to offer, BUT YOU DO! (Women's Mentoring Ministry) **Older men...**the young men need you! **We need to be united GENERATIONALLY!** (Worship Wars, style differences, etc)

We need to be united ETHNICALLY! When was the last time we found ourselves praying for the different ethnic ministries in our church. We call ourselves an International Church...but are we at heart? Do we care? Do we encourage each other in the hallways? Not those the same color as you, but those of different color.

We need to be unified ECONOMICALLY! What about those who don't dress like you? Those who don't smell like you? Those who don't have hair like you? Those who have piercings where you don't?

I think that what the text is saying to us is that when we really get a hold of unity and it becomes a part of our whole life, not only will there be a blessing of life and grace, but also a blessing of Salvation. The world will be changed.

I John 3:16 says it pretty plainly, "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.*" So that makes no room at all for the argument, "Well, I'll love them, but I don't have to like them." "Like" is such a lesser affection than "love" and you probably won't lay down your life for someone you don't love. It's a command to deeply love. To be involved in each other's lives. To be interested in each other. To make our business their business and to make theirs ours! **HOW UNIFIED?** ONE. "...Father just as you are in me and I in you." That's pretty stuck together.

So we've looked at unity and we've seen that God is wanting us to see just how amazing it is! He wants us to dive into its current and get swept away in it. To be immersed in it. Not only one part of us, but all parts. Not only on Saturday/Sunday, but every day.

SO WHAT DO WE DO? A few things:

1) Fight for it. Unity doesn't come easily and the enemy knows that if this happens that the Kingdom of God will explode. He doesn't want me to be saying these things tonight. He hates unity. Great relationships take great vigilance and resolve because we will encounter the enemy, no doubt. We need to be ready.

2) Cultivate it. Like a garden grows when it is nourished and cared for, unity grows when it is cultivated. Practice unity as Paul says, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

-Pray for a heart for oneness.

--Pray for others

-Pray for a love of the name. His name unifies and so we need to hold it high. Jesus did not want sameness, but oneness. God's value is not sameness. Our God is a very creative God who has made us all very different for a reason. But in a world of variety and difference, His name unites. His name is our common denominator.

-Pray for a heart of humility.

Matt. 5:23-24 - As we continue to worship tonight, it is important for us to understand that just as anointing oil was necessary and a prerequisite for consecrating the High Priest for his ministry before the Lord, our unity in the body is a prerequisite for our worship and ministry before the Lord.

READ PASSAGE: "If you are worshiping me and you have hatred in your heart for your brother, leave your songs and your sacrifice at the altar, go love your brother and REALLY worship me!" It's a terrifying thought that we would just roll in to church and get our "worship" on, but that it would be unacceptable to him. So before our songs tonight, I think God is saying it's time to love each other, let go of all our grudges, forgive all who have hurt us, lied against us, forgive all who have made our name look bad. We have made Christ's name look bad and he has lavished forgiveness on us.

Maybe you've resented in your heart someone **ethnically**. Maybe you've grown up with that kind of mindset and it was passed on to you from mom or dad.
Maybe you have bitterness in your heart for someone of another **generation**...or perhaps a complete generation. Maybe you've lived a life of looking down upon someone in a different **economic class** as you...whether it is a higher or lower class. **Let's humble ourselves before the Lord and continue the journey toward the most ultimate experience of unity.**