



The Sermon

Psalm 133

"The Beauty of Unity"

TRANSCRIPT

It's my pleasure to be here. Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 133. That'd be the Scripture I seek to explain to you this morning by God's grace. Psalm 133, a familiar Psalm that's titled the Song of Ascents of David. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord commanded the blessing, life forever."

Our Father, we ask that you would use your Word, your powerful, sovereign Word, that same Word that you spoke and created the universe to confront us today, to challenge us, to encourage us, to change us. God, may you use your Word through the vehicle of your Spirit. We know that something special happens when the Word and Spirit come together. Apart from your Spirit, your Word would be true but it wouldn't be effectual. So, we ask your Spirit to move among us as our teacher and apply these truths to our heart. We ask that we would see a fresh vision of your Son and that God in all your triune beauty would be on display as your Word brings glory to your Son. Thank you for these dear people, for this church as they gather. I ask that you continue to build them up in their faith. May this Word be a timely one. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Again, we're grateful to be here with you, for the invitation back to Texas, less grateful than the invitation in March because it's different. There's something that's happened here. I'm not sure exactly what's transpired but it's just beautiful here in March. [Laughter] It's just not the same. I don't know how to describe it. [Laughter] I told Matt I'm considering using the word warmish. [Laughter] It's warmish. It's like the entire city has because a mouth [Laughter] so some moisture there.

I grew up in New Mexico, which has no precipitation whatsoever so this is a challenge for the arid man. [Laughter] I'm like a lizard in a moist place. So, no, it's good to be with you and we're grateful. Californians brag about the weather but I don't know if it's right. It's 98 Thanksgiving Day in Los Angeles. So, there are takeaways for sure.

Before us is a Psalm I think that is familiar to us, Psalm 133 but, obviously, misunderstood. It contains in it some language that is odd, some similes, comparisons that are hard to maybe wrap your mind around. But if you could use your imagination for a second, I'd like to have you think about Psalm 133. Let's pretend together that when we leave here today there's a news truck in the parking lot. Whatever the local station is, your favorite news reporter is there with his hair coiffed and his microphone in hand. They're going to do a story on what's going on in this place. So, as you file out of here and go to your cars that news reporter asks you, what's happening at that coffee shop? Why are people coming in there dressed up to various degrees and with their Bibles? What is this?

You see the opportunity and so you answer the question. We go to church. They say, in a coffee shop? You say yeah because a church isn't about the building. A building isn't what makes a church a church you tell this intrepid journalist. You say it's the people. We gather to worship and exalt our Savior. We come together because we love Jesus. We listen to his Word. We sing songs about what God has done. We bring praise and honor to him in worship. That's what we do. We're a church.

Because it's 2018, the time of fake news, they ask you questions, not about the facts but about the feelings. The journalist asks a powerful follow-up question. Why do you go there? How does it make you feel?

I hope you would answer this way. I hope you would say, you know, when I come to a church on Sunday morning, it makes me feel like oil, precious oil, running down the edges of a beard, even Aaron's beard. That reporter will maybe give you a second look and say, could you maybe put it a different way for the viewers? He's trying to go for the story and the lead anchor chair. You'd say yeah. I could put it another way. What's it like? How do I feel when I go to church? It's like the dew of Mount Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion. That's what it's like. The reporter would look to the camera and say let's go back to the studio. That's enough. Shut it down.

Strange, isn't it? It'd be an interesting way to think about how we feel about fellowship. But this is how David, the leader of God's people in ancient Israel, described the feeling of God's people being together. So, I ask you, what is it like? What is it like to be with God's people, to come together on a Sunday morning? You could think about the church you grew up in. You could think about this church but your conception of fellowship, what's most familiar to you when you come together to be with your church family, to associate with God's people in worship.

How do you describe the kind of pleasurable joy we experience in Christian fellowship? What is the experience of spiritual unity like? What does it mean to you? What does it contribute to your life? How does it affect you? How does it make you feel? How does spiritual unity influence the way that you lead your family and the way that you get up on a Sunday morning, the way that you use your money, the way that you go to work the day after church? How does spiritual unity feel? What is it like?

This morning, Psalm 133, a seemingly enigmatic illustrations and exclamatory phrases about brethren dwelling together are inspired by God.

They're intended to move us all to a greater appreciation and understanding of the preciousness of fellowship and provoke even greater appreciation to praise and value something that God himself praises and values. You see, Psalm 133 is an ancient hymn composed in praise of spiritual unity.

Now, we all understand the contrast right away. Disunity, disunity is a problem as old as Cain and Abel. It's disunity that split Judah and Israel. It's been a pernicious problem in churches all the way back to Philippi. The call for harmony in churches and between believers is repeatedly addressed in the New Testament and even called out by name in the case of Euodia and Syntyche.

In Corinth, the factions were so famously divisive that people said in their kind of pseudo spirituality I follow after Paul. I'm a truth guy like Paul. He's my kind of style. Others would divide and say I like the human failings of Peter, his authenticity. I'm a Peter/Cephas guy. The really spiritual ones would say I'm of Jesus. So, that disunity in Corinth was famous as they split into their factions.

In Philippi, there were the **polytheists** and the anti-polytheists. Paul wrote to them and said, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree and there be no divisions among you that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." In Ephesians 4:13, he speaks of unity and maturity in the faith, something about unity as a mark of maturity. In Colossians 3, he says, "Above all these things put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." In 1 Peter 3:8, he says, "Be like-minded, sympathetic. Love one another." Or Ephesians 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace."

So, there's a widespread emphasis in the New Testament about the significance and importance of unity. It would be difficult to try to pinpoint an issue more singularly repeated on in nearly every book of the New Testament. I wonder if sometimes we're suspicious to a call for unity. If the

first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word unity is the fact the Evangelicalism has been diluted by ecumenical spirits. The first thing you think of is, well, what about the truth? There's no unity apart from the truth. You're right. Some Christians, it seems like, wake up every day with an itchy trigger finger to log onto Facebook and correct all the wrong Christians in the world.

I think that's where Psalm 133 can be helpful to us, to put an emphasis not against truth loving, not against believing strongly, but a reminder of just how essential it is to our happiness and holiness that, especially in a manifestation like this in a local church, there is a strong desire for unity, to know just how sweet and fundamental fellowship is and needs to be. Don't get me wrong. The Scripture certainly calls us to defend the faith, to divide from apostasy and unbelief. If the integrity of the gospel is lost or compromised, the church's mission is lost. We don't dilute the truth to accommodate as many as possible. Sound doctrine is essential for the unity of the church because the only true unity is unity in the truth. We don't compromise essential, historic, biblical doctrine in the name of unity. We don't negotiate on the gospel. We're all aware of the kind of doctrinal laxity that pretends to accomplish spiritual unity.

But the question this morning I have for you is, are you as aware of a kind of doctrinal over exuberance that often prohibits it? The apostle Paul was aware of both. He addressed both doctrinal laxity and over exuberance in Corinth and appealed to both parties for unity's sake. The basis of true unity, true spiritual unity is the truth, not compromise. But we can't in the name of truth tacitly accept disunity as just part of the fallen world, especially not in its most significant manifestations in a local church. To being committed to the church, if being committed to the church has made you suspicious of the word unity, you need to listen carefully to a song, an ancient song that King David wrote.

Psalm 133 doesn't address the out workings of unity in a local church context. It's way too old for that. Instead, it provides a reminder of the foundational and inherent beauty of spiritual harmony. To be in accord with

the people of God is desirable and praiseworthy. It's a testimony to a watching world of the love of the body of Christ and the love of commonality we experience in our churches. Our churches ought to have a pleasing aroma, a life giving testimony to the vitality and importance of praising spiritual unity.

This is a song sung in celebration of the blessings of covenant fellowship as seen in the unity of brothers. Let's begin this song by surrounding it. Let's look at the context of this little gem of a song. You see at the superscription there. It says a Song of Ascents of David. So, the context is Davidic. This has been used throughout the ages since David's time. In Israel, it was part of a group of travel songs.

Psalms 120-134 are known as the Songs of Ascent or Pilgrim Songs. They were the songs sung by those ancient worshippers on their way back to Jerusalem for all the required feasts and celebrations that they were called back to the temple, back to central worship. So, every head of household, every tribe would make their way back to Jerusalem several times a year in order to participate in this communal worship. The songs that they sang on their way were assembled into this part of the psalter Psalm 120-134. As they approached, and entered, and left the sanctuary, their community would sing these songs at the annual feast and festivals.

Psalm 133 is the center of three songs called Zion songs. 132:13 speaks of Zion. It says, "For the Lord has chosen Zion. He has desired it for his habitation." Zion is that place where Heaven and Earth met. Zion is the name for the mountain on which Jerusalem was situated. Zion is an important piece of real estate in the Bible. Whenever it's called Zion, it's a reminder that it's God's chosen place, just like it says in Psalm 132:13. Zion is at the center of Psalm 133 as well. You'll see it in Verse 3, "coming down upon the mountains of Zion". And then the Zion trilogy continues in Psalm 134:3. It says, "May the Lord bless you from Zion who made heavens and earth."

It's a favorite topic for these Pilgrim songs, these traveler songs, the Songs of Ascent because that was the destination. Everybody was looking forward to being there. Zion was the place where God issued his blessings and the holy hills on which Jerusalem was situated was the locale that was this special meeting place, a sacred place where God had commanded his people to come to. It was his holy city. It was a place of blessing. So, it has a special focus in this song. Understanding what Psalm 133 is trying to teach us, one of the keys is understanding this concept of Zion.

It's important to note that this song has been sung by God's people for 3,000 years, penned by that famous shepherd turned monarch, songwriter, harp player, King David. It's a song that was employed throughout Israel's history and eventually put into this compilation, the Songs of Ascent to the psalter. We don't know exactly when David wrote it. You could see how it could find different circumstances that would be ideal.

Maybe it was when David had that great display of unity as the people all rallied around his kingship in 2 Samuel, Chapter 5 and 6. The Ark of the Covenant was there, the new Capital city of Jerusalem. That would've been a very appropriate celebratory occasion for this song as the people sang about the unity they found around their new chosen King David, the blessing that they'd seen on his life through the hand of God.

This song could've also been composed in times of trouble though. Couldn't it have? We don't know but maybe it was useful in hard times in David's reign, when his son had turned against him. Then, later in history, maybe in the days of Hezekiah, when tensions ran high between Judah and Israel, when the kingdom was actually divided, when fellowship was broken, when dark days of civil war were upon the people. Then a song like this would've been a poignant and painful reminder of the longing for the restoration of the united kingdom and repair of the breach between brothers. So, in times of unity, this song expressed joyful praise. And in times of discord, this song was an expression of longing for a restoration of the sweet unity that had been lost.

You could see that this song has some structure to it as well. Like so much Hebrew poetry, the focus is on the middle. It matches. The ends are matching and then it points towards the middle. The middle of this song would be the name of Aaron, right in the center. So, there's a kind of parallelism that gives a song like this focus.

But the way I want to break it up today – and I promise to stop preaching before we go to the lake together in a great display of unity [Laughter] – we'll look at it in three parts, okay? Verse 1 we'll call in praise of spiritual unity, in praise of spiritual unity. And then, Verse 2 and 3, the center section of this song, we'll look at the two portraits of spiritual unity, those two similes that are so unusual. And then, we'll close it off at the end of Verse 3 with the power of spiritual unity.

So, let's begin with Verse 1, the praise or in praise of spiritual unity. It begins with a great word, behold, or since we have a new pulpit, behold. It's a word intended to get your attention, right? That's the word behold. Psalm 133 and 134 are the only Psalms that begin with the word behold. It's a word that just demands our attention. That's why this psalm is sometimes classified as a wisdom psalm, like the proverbs or wisdom literature. It's the kind of stuff that makes you think. This song doesn't actually tell you to do anything. But that's one of the ways that this song is so powerful. There are no commands in it. It doesn't say try to get along with each other. It doesn't say make sure your church has a sweet aroma to it. But a wisdom song makes you think.

Many of us will walk away from a song like this with differing applications knowing where we have erred when it comes to unity and knowing where we can excel still more. So, a wisdom song is like that. It makes us scratch our heads. It makes us think. It intentionally is provocative. By observing, and praising, and celebrating, it provides God's people an opportunity to pursue unity and reminds us what life is like when unity is not present.

One author says, certainly, even the absence of unity can teach the blessing of unity. Sometimes the strongest exhortation comes by way of observation. You see a harmonious fellowship and you're reminded of that. You see a family in discord and you're reminded of how sweet it is when everybody gets along. So, the psalmist does here is he simply declares the inherent value and beauty of spiritual unity by saying, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."

His statement's a simple one, isn't it? He just says how good and pleasant, two descriptive words that we'll look at in a moment. What is it that's good and pleasant? It's this phrase "for brothers to dwell together in unity". It's a phrase that David probably took from Deuteronomy 25:5. The identical phrase is there. In Deuteronomy 25, it's a piece of legislation that describes how brothers should, literally, live together in a situation where they have common property, where their families and all the cousins are together, and what should happen if tragedy should strike, whether something familial, one of the brothers dies, or something economic. The idea in Deuteronomy 25 is teaching families how they are to watch out for one another in ancient Israel.

And so, David pulls that phrase "brothers to dwell together in unity" not to restrict it to be a song just about how brothers specifically should get along. In fact, that's not the idea here at all in the context of the Songs of Ascent. Physical family, literal brothers, is being applied here to the idea of a spiritual community, the family of God. It's used, this concept of brothers, throughout the Old Testament to refer to those not only who are physically related but to those who have life in proximity to one another, responsibility to one another. Brothers is a way to express this familial connection.

But the emphasis here is on the dwelling together. There's something closer than blood here. There's something in David's song about a oneness of heart and purpose. If you think about the Pilgrims as they sang a song like this, as they approached Jerusalem, how much they needed a unifying song. If we can have trouble getting to church on a Sunday morning, various kinds of trouble could assail us on the way to church, right?

Familial issues, the kids fighting in the back seat, car problems, 105 degrees, whatever. There are things that can happen on the way to church. Somebody forgot a shoe. That's happened to us. How do you forget a shoe? Kids. It happens.

Think about their journey traveling from the far north of Israel all the way down south, the perils along the way. To prepare a family to travel many miles along ancient roads, bringing along sacrificial animals and offering, all the stuff a family needs to travel on foot a great distance. All the stuff that the kids would bring, the logistics of food, water, the disagreements along the way, the ancient equivalent of arguing in the back seat, whatever that is. I'm sure Hebrew children ask are we there yet? I think that's a timeless thing, ever since the fall. The dangers on the highways and the byways, the logistics of travel, robbers and thieves along the way, all that went along with the crowds pressing into Jerusalem. There were no Google maps. There was no texting trying to meet up with kinfolk, trying to find a place to stay.

You could imagine the stress in this moment as the people finally arrive in Jerusalem. The congestion, the crowds, the tempers as travelers finally in Jerusalem, weary from their journey trying to stick together, meet up with relatives, a sea of humanity jostling, heads bobbing through crowded streets as worshippers seek lodging and food and bumping into each other as they prepare for the festivals and necessities for their week-long stay and then, after all is done, preparing for their journey home. They needed to hear the words, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together." There were aspects of it that were obviously not good and pleasant. So, he says, good and pleasant.

The word good in the Old Testament is an important word. It's one of the first descriptive words in the Bible. When God created the world, he said it was good. That becomes a word that God uses to describe his own nature. God is good. So, when God calls something good he speaks of the objective and inherent nature of the thing. It is good in and of itself. It's how God assessed creation. It's how God describes his character. So, when

God says that spiritual unity, that brethren dwelling together, that God's people being together is good, he's teaching us something true, inherently true, undeniably true.

When he says it's pleasant, it's a different word. It speaks of the subjective experience of things. We all understand things that are pleasant. We would call them wonderful, delightful, lovely, pleasing. We understand that sometimes there's a difference between good and pleasant, right? Ice cream is pleasant but it's not good. Exercise is good. Those kind of things, a thousand examples.

Unity, though, is both good and pleasant. I think that's a helpful reminder. We all know people – you're all at church so I'm not preaching at you. I promise. But we all know people that skip, not just a week, not just vacation in the summer, but who haven't been to church in years. They would be the first to tell you that they love Jesus and they believe the Bible. But they were burned by the church or something like that. There are plenty of folks like that. They can't find a church that agrees with them so they're not going to be a part of any church. If you've ever been in that stage as a believer or if you know folks like that, it's a painful place to be for these people. They're in a place of spiritual isolation. One of the things that they're lacking is unity.

I've been a youth pastor my whole life working with college students, high school students. I remember being in a Starbucks. Apologies. [Laughter] I've got to go hard H on herb. But I was in a Starbucks once and I recognized the eyes of the barista. He was a bearded guy, kind of a college-aged guy. But I recognized his eyes as a junior high kid I once knew. I said, "Seth, is that you behind that scraggly beard?" He said, "Yeah." He was larger and bearded now. So, I was like, "It's so good to see you. I haven't seen you in church in so many years."

I was his youth pastor at this old church in New Mexico, which is now the New _____ Mexico. I said to him, "Seth, where you been? Are you still a

Christian?" I like to ask people that question because it's provocative and offensive. So, whenever I say something provocative and offensive, I usually follow with no offense and then you're supposed to say none taken. So, just remember that in the two weeks I'll be here. Let's practice. No offense. None taken. See, everything's fine. So, I said, "Seth, are you still a Christian?" And he was so offended by that question. Of course, I'm still a Christian. All right, I was just asking.

And then, I have a follow up question that chases that question like a dog chases a mail man. It's this one. Where are you going to church? He starts to stammer and he says well, you know, some, some Sundays I work here at Starbucks. You know, I've got to wear the apron. Other Sundays, you know, I go, I just, I listen, I listen to sermons. You know, I can listen to them on my phone and stuff. You know, sometimes, my friends and I, we go to this church. The pastor there is funny. We go to this church because they've got a good band. We go, you know, so, we kind of move around. And I said Seth – you know, what could I say? He's listening to the teaching of the Bible on his phone. He can sing worship songs in his car. He hangs out with other Christians. What's he lacking? Well, I tell him, Buddy, where's your accountability? Where's your true spiritual fellowship because God intended you to be a part of a family of God? He gave me an Americano and I took off.

We can all think of examples like that where somebody has become a spiritual ecclesiastical hobo. They go from place to place. Nothing's good enough for them or they've grown so detached and independent that they can't live their life in community with other people. Why am I going on and on about this? The verse says it's good and pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity. The prerequisite for unity is plurality. In other words, God never intended you to be a lone ranger Christian. Even Lone Ranger had Tonto. So, come on. [Laughter] God didn't intend you to be isolated. He intended you to live your Christian life together with other believers. This is important for leaders in the church as well as for people in the church. Leaders should be people.

I try to think like this. Before I'm a pastor at Grace Church, I remind myself as we get ready for church in the morning because I'm going to work, I remind myself I'm going to worship. I'm going to church. I'm a member of this church. I want to be a part of what God is doing there. We have to guard ourselves from that kind of professional detachment. We're believers. We're members of the church. We should never get over that.

So, the inherent goodness depicted in Verse 1 really is rooted in God's trinity. When we think about God being three in one, we're reminded of his singularity and this unutterably beautiful reality that is Trinitarian joy. Spiritual unity is something praiseworthy because, even in eternity past, God had a perfect fellowship within the Trinity. That's a profound reality. Theologians in the old school for thousands of years have thought about the Trinity in relation to things like human relationships and even things like music. The ladies were up here singing and their voices came together beautifully in harmony. The old theologians would say even the existence of music, of harmony, of different notes sounding together pleasantly, is evidence of God's Trinity, of God's harmoniousness.

How much more so is the fellowship of God's people prefigured for us in ancient Israel but made manifest in the gathering of the Gentiles and the formation of local churches to worship Jesus? Every time we enter life together, we should see the melodious harmony, the beauty and pleasantness of spiritual unity. So, that's where this song starts. With a foundation that says unity is not just important, it's beautiful. It's desirable. It's inherently good.

Let's look at the middle part of this song, part two, two portraits of spiritual unity, two portraits of spiritual unity. Verse 2 says, "It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It's like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion." So, there are the two pictures. There are the two pictures. The first one is an illustration or best called not really a metaphor but a simile, like or as precious oil upon the head. The Hebrew is literally good oil or excellent oil. The idea is a special fragrant

oil. The first picture of unity in the psalmist's mind, when he thinks of God's people being committed to one another, loving one another, dwelling together in peaceful harmony and worship, and in the fear of the Lord is oil.

Now, this isn't the only place we know about oil from the Bible. And I don't want to do a nine minute study on the sacred anointing oil from Exodus 30 so I'll do like an eight minute version. [Laughter] The recipe for the oil that the Old Testament talks about – I'm not really going to do an eight minute version [Laughter] – is in Exodus 30. There's a recipe given. You can have your quiet time in the oil passage tomorrow. [Laughter] Verses 23 and 24 talk about the recipe, what goes into it and how to make it in Verse 25.

The Old Testament has this strange obsession with particularity, right? Even in the making of this sacred worship oil, it tells you exactly how it was done and exactly how to mix it. And then it speaks of the articles that are to be anointed with it and what isn't to be anointed with it, how holy the people need to be who are involved in this process. And then it teaches that the priests were supposed to be anointed with the oil. And then a prohibition is given that only the priests were allowed to be anointed with this oil, not the people.

Anyone outside of the priesthood was forbidden to make this oil. They would have the recipe because it was in the Torah but they weren't ever to make it. Only the priests were to make it. It goes on and on describing this special sacred oil. If someone else touched the oil or tried to recreate the formula, they were to be cast out of the people. This is serious.

If you look too much into this in your quiet time and start googling things, you'll see our Pentecostal friends trying to decide if they're allowed to make the oil, and if it has healing properties, and weird stuff like that. Or worse, if any of you sell essential oils, that's not what this is about. I'm not interested. It won't cure my baldness. [Laughter] I get about one friend request a week on that. It's incurable. I'm sorry.

What's this about? Why oil? Why all the details? I think the thing to take away is the entire ceremony and the entire formula demonstrates that this was sacred. God set this high priest apart. He set this formula apart to convey a sacred blessing from God himself. The oil was intentionally mixed and made in a sacred way and then poured on the head of the priest to represent his consecration, his holiness into priestly service. Then that priest, in turn, would do what a priest does. All priests represent the people to God and God to the people. That's what a priest is for. So, the whole thing is crying out sacred, holy, special.

And then it says that, in Verse 2, "It's like precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard." This part I like because I'm a beard guy and so is Spurgeon. Spurgeon said growing a beard is a habit most natural, scriptural, manly, and beneficial. Okay, I got one, [Laughter] I got one and a half beards, one and a half beards. So, Austin, I'm not making fun of your beard. I like your beard. You have a great name though. I really like your name. [Laughter]

So, the beard, it wasn't because they were hipsters in a coffee shop. That's not why the priest had a beard. The beard was part of the uniform for a priest. They had to grow their beard. They weren't allowed to trim the edges. You read that stuff in the Old Testament. The oil was put on the priest's head. The reason it went to the beard is because of a phenomenon that God invented called gravity. It's what liquid does. It goes down. And so, poured on the head, it would follow the natural tendencies of liquid and gravity. It would flow down onto the beard and then even onto the opening or the edges of his garments. And so this bountiful sacred oil, fragrant and wonderful and symbolic, would be poured onto the head of the priest never to be touched by anyone else.

Then a particular priest's name is mentioned. It says even Aaron, which every bit of this is just amplifying the sacredness. So, the priest is one thing. The high priest is another thing. And then to say Aaron is to say the guy who started it all. He was the first of the Levitical priesthood. He was

the one who was ordained by Moses himself. There's no bigger name when it came to worship leaders in Israel than Aaron. He's the founder of the whole thing.

So, this priestly ministry, this representative ministry, by nature what a priest does, stands between God and the people. To say Aaron was to say the priest that represented all the other priests. All the other priests came from him. So, the gravitas of the name Aaron and it being at the very center of this poem, it's like there's a big highlighter right here in the middle saying this oil flows down. This sacred, precious oil flowing down, coming down, a phrase that's repeated throughout this song. See it in Verse 3, coming down, over and over again, this downward motion, this sacred oil, this special person, this ordination from God himself, on Aaron himself.

What is this picture saying to us? Why is this the way that we should think about unity? Why was it the first way that David would describe it? Well, it's because this unity, this description, is supposed to sound other worldly sacred and special. This anointing, ultimately, didn't come from Moses. It came from God himself. This portrayal is of the priest being set apart, differentiated, but never separated from his people entirely because he represented them. So, this abundant precious oil, flowing down in repetition and direction, is giving us several signals here. It's telling us a few things about unity. One, unity is special. It is sacred. It is holy. And it is something that comes from, second, God above.

There are churches that have programs to try to foster church unity. There are specialists you can fly into your church who will help you solve problems of disunity. There's an entire ministry that's founded trying to reconcile people and figure out what kinks are in the hose in church relationships. Try this paradigm. Try this seminar. This, this, this.

What I hear, when I hear precious oil coming down upon the head, upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, is this is reminding us that unity, true unity in a local church, is a gift from a holy God. It is something that we should

revere. It is something we should pray for. It is not something that is conjured up by human activity ultimately. It is something that comes down from God above as a particular blessing from him. It is not something you can contrive or manufacture with potlucks.

Unity is a gift from a holy God. When it exists in a place of spiritual fellowship, it is a powerful, even miraculous thing. That oil, that special oil flowing down in abundance recognizes the direction of unity. Unity is spiritual and useful to God. This song says coming down three times. Not just because it makes for a good jingle in the tune. Because it's reminding us that true unity is sent down, not stirred up. True unity finds its origin from above.

It's why Paul said in Ephesians 4, "Therefore, as prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility, and gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace." If our unity is supernatural, then it's spiritual. It's not something we create. It's a work of the spirit. It's God wrought. The spirit creates it. It's the believer's responsibility to maintain it. That begins with first savoring its inherent worth, acknowledging its goodness and pleasantness, and then seeing that it's from above.

There is a source and strength in unity when we know that it comes from God above, a special gift to his people. Just like this oil, it was abundant, poured all over this priest's head. It wasn't a drop or two. It dripped down onto the robes. It was valuable. It was precious. It was sacred but it was abundant.

True fellowship is like that, isn't it? It has a hard time being contained to Sunday mornings 15 minutes before church. It goes into our homes. It'll be at the lake this afternoon. It'll be rejoicing when two brothers meet at a coffee shop for Bible study accountability or when you run into another believer in the grocery store. There is a kind of abundance to unity where

we see it in our local churches, manifestations of this where old and young come together, where different colors of people come together, different backgrounds of people come together.

It's something that the world talks about all the time. They just want unity. They want unity. They will never have it like the church has it because it's only found in the gospel. This teaches us that spiritual unity, true fellowship among God's people is divine. It is from God. Like every good and perfect gift, it's from above. Unity, like that oil, has a pleasing fragrance, an inherent goodness. It's related to that divine origin. The abundance of it has to do with the abundance of God. It's generous.

Fellowship has that tendency. Fellowship doesn't have a closed door policy. Fellowship doesn't have an in crowd mentality. It welcomes brothers and sisters in. It readily embraces those who have this common familial bond as worshippers. Fellowship is expansive and it's prone to overflow just like that oil after the service, in the parking lot, at a restaurant, in your homes all week long. When your church is unified, your church, like that oil, will smell good. It will smell good in here.

This is what Jesus promised, isn't it? The world will know you belong to me, he prayed in John 17, by what? It's your love for one another, isn't it? So, that's how powerful and abundant this unity is. So, a church has got to have this kind of unity in their leadership. It's got a unity among their families and this kind of example to follow. If you love God, you will love to be with God's people. We need fellowship. We need the community of other believers. We need to be about unity that isn't just our local manifestations.

It's why it's so important that we actively pray for other churches in our area. I think that's one way to manifest unity in your church is to pray for other churches. As a pastor, it's easy to look down on other churches the way that maybe your smoothie shops or whatever your business may be – I'm going to pretend you own a smoothie shop – to look down at other smoothie shops as your competition, right? Churches should never think

that way. In this day and age of church plants everywhere, you all are in a league that's crowded, right?

There are church plants in every middle school in Dallas probably. That's what it's like in California, tons of them. Sometimes, these things look at each other kind of suspiciously. You think about these church plants, usually pastored by – they meet in a middle school. They're usually pastored by somebody who dresses like he's in middle school. There I go disparaging it again. [Laughter] But when you think about other churches, when you think about other church plants, do you pray for their spiritual success? Do you pray for that church to thrive, to know the blessing of God? Or is that something you want to reserve for yourself?

I think that reminds us that unity is holy and sacred. We don't chalk up this unity to body life in a fallen world. But we model it in our local manifestations and then we pray for it all around. That's the first portrait is that oil, so sacred, from above, coming down, fragrant, wonderful, holy, gloriously divine.

What about the second portrait? It says like the dew of Hermon, like the dew of Hermon. And this one's maybe even stranger to us. Hermon, well, dew, we all know what dew is. You all have it in the air you breathe. [Laughter] It's droplets of water that appears on grass and other surfaces in the morning or evening due to condensation, atmospheric moisture. It condenses faster than it can evaporate resulting in the formation of water droplets, Wikipedia. [Laughter] So, we know what dew is.

What about Hermon? Well, that's a particular place, a geographical place. It's the highest peak in Israel, way up in the north. Mount Hermon was 9,232 feet above sea level. What do you call water droplets on Hermon? You call it Mountain Dew. [Laughter] Youth pastor – you invited a youth pastor. You get youth pastor comedy. [Laughter] Yep, Mountain Dew. Do the dew. What's he dewing here?

So, the highest peak in Israel, Mount Hermon, 9,000 feet, has dew on it. It was that kind of a place. It was the kind of place that a person in Jerusalem, a dry and arid place, would long to go on a hot, dry day because it was the elevation. It's why Texans go up to the mountains, right? It's cool air. They go to the lake. They go to the mountains. Mount Hermon was a getaway kind of place. It was a place that was refreshing. It had higher altitude. It had cooler temperatures and it had green, green grass everywhere and big trees.

Zion looked a lot like it looks now, if you've ever been to Israel or looked at pictures, dusty, dry, only 2,000 feet above sea level, relatively insignificant. It didn't have the kind of dew that Hermon had. If you were on Mount Hermon, you would experience a kind of vibrancy, a kind of vitality. If you were on Mount Zion, it was a dry and dusty place. It had a city right on top of it too. This Verse 3, this second illustration about unity, says it's like the dew of Hermon, the richness, the vibrancy, the vitality, coming down upon – there's that directional word again – the mountains of Zion.

Maybe you're tempted to think this is some description of the hydrological cycle in Israel. It's not. We're talking about a hundred miles north. The water didn't gather on Hermon, come down the mountain, travel down south, and climb up the mountain in Jerusalem to Mount Zion. That's not what he's describing. It's a simile. It's poetic. What he's describing here is Mount Zion having the same kind of weather and environment as Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon was precipitous, and snow-capped, and lush, and a verdant mountain in that far north of Israel. Mount Zion was where the temple was, the hill that Jerusalem stood on, dry and arid. It would have moisture and dew but, in contrast, it was much lower and much drier.

The poetry saying is that there is Hebron like conditions upon Mount Zion. Literally, it says, "like the dew of Hermon going down upon the mountains of Zion". It's as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. It's like saying the forecast this week in Dallas is going to be 70 degrees, a little bit

of snow on Wednesday. It's not going to happen. And if it did, it would be divine. That's what's being described here.

These two illustrations, first, the oil of consecration pointing to unity as a sacred blessing from God, creating these priestly people as they were meant to be. The second illustration is a miraculous one. It's Hermon's dew falling upon Zion's hill, the chief mountain of the north changing places with the chief mountain of the south, uniting them. That could only be an act of God. That's what unity is like. It is a God wrought miracle. Unity is life giving and it produces an atmosphere that is sweet.

In other words, when the people would all gather to Jerusalem to worship, they would come there and the roads would be crowded. The traffic would be horrible, people traffic, camel traffic. Imagine it. It would be dusty and it would be hot but it would be sweet because they were coming together to worship the living God. It would be good because now the tribes were united. They were offering acceptable worship in the fear of the Lord. They were singing these old songs together. They were hearing the Word of God preached. They were having their souls stirred up. You see, it was like a weekend on that beautiful mountain with its lush green hills and its snowcapped tops. We're talking about a sweet and life giving atmosphere.

That's how it should feel when you come to church. A weekend away is oftentimes something we need. But a Sunday at church should be something we can't live without. The way we long for a vacation, the way we long for a place that's sweet and refreshing, to take in that mountain air, to enjoy some time on the lake. Those are sweet things. Every Sunday at church should feel like that in some way. Every Sunday when you come together as a church to evidence salvation and love for brothers and sisters in Christ, you're reminding yourself that you have more in common with these people than you do with your unbelieving family members. You're reminding yourself that you have more in common with Christians that are gathering all over the planet. You have more in common with a Christian in Guatemala who likes soccer than you do with another unbelieving Lone Star

resident. Do you know that? That's the bond of unity that brings God's people together.

That's why we have to guard and protect what God has accomplished. That's why we've got to teach and model unity. That's why we have to spend time together. It's why we need to read the Scriptures together. It's why we need to pray together. It's why we need to take the Lord's Supper together. It's why we need to observe baptism together. These are things that unify God's people.

Finally – some of you said amen to finally [Laughter] – we get to the third point. It's the power of spiritual unity, the power of spiritual unity. Look at the end of Verse 3. It says, "For there the Lord commanded the blessing life forever." So, for or because there. What's there? Well, the antecedent is Zion. We're still talking about that holy mountain. There is the location of the blessing. Zion connects us back to Verse 1, how good and pleasant, that little blessing formula of Verse 1.

And so, the song is finishing like it starts because it's speaking of a blessing being commanded on Zion. It's a blessing that God himself gives, according to that line for there Yahweh – it's his covenant name – commanded the blessing. There are lots of blessings that God commands for his people, right? Peace or prosperity in different situations. There are plenty of blessings. But that's not the blessing that he identifies that's related to unity. He identifies a blessing called life forever. Interesting. Why highlight at the end of a song about unity this particular blessing, the blessing of eternal life?

We've seen that there's vitality to blessing. We've seen the sacredness to blessing. We've seen a divine nature in blessing. But what does the blessing of unity have to do with life forever? The key, again, is that word that. He's tying us back to Zion and to the covenant name of God being the source of the blessing. And then he equates it with forever kind of life. If this blessing is falling by Yahweh's command and it is.

We're reminded that God's Word is omnipotent. When Yahweh speaks, he accomplishes something. When God says life, it happens every time. When it says forever there, it's talking about Zion. That's key here. Zion was that place that we've spent some time in this song thinking about, that beautiful, green, high, wonderful place where Heaven met Earth, where the temple was founded, where the people would gather. It portrayed the dwelling place of God. That's what the temple was for. It's where Heaven and Earth met.

He's not saying that unity creates eternal life. But what he is saying is that when we cherish and we relish the unity that God relishes and cherishes, we share in his sort of life. Unity among God's people is a foretaste of Heaven. It's eternal life like. That's why we would never want to bring harm or division to the body. It's why we always want to preserve peace, and love, and joy, and fellowship. It's why we're zealous about unity. It's why we guard unity.

Fellowship, true spiritual unity, is the concern of this song. But when you think about it, these people had a ton in common, didn't they? They had the same DNA. They were all Jewish. They were Israelites. They walked up that holy hill. They were all relatives. But still, the unity that they knew was nothing compared to the unity that God would bring in the New Covenant.

As the Spirit of God was poured out upon all of God's people, and all were made partakers and participants, and all were united under their great high priest Jesus who prayed to his Father for the perfect unity to be a witness of their unbreakable connection to the triune God and to one another. This psalm at the end reminds us that when you cherish and relish unity, it reminds you that you are part of the life that God has and his life is eternal.

This psalm screams for us to us look forward, for David to look forward to a time when these brothers wouldn't be plagued by tribal divisions, or by a

north-south division of Judah and Israel, or by any division whatsoever. But when God would bring all his chosen people together by the Spirit that would unify them in the promise of the glorious New Covenant, in the power of the gospel. David sang about something that he only knew in part but now, with a heavenly perspective, he sees far more clearly.

We experience it in a greater manifestation in our churches as we see God working all over the face of this world, not just in a nation called Israel but all over this world calling people to himself, uniting them in his Son, unifying them by his Spirit. The gospel is here to be drunk deeply from, my friends, reminding us that we can know this in a more full way. Christ transcends every racial or ethnic distinction. The salvation plan of God in the end is that worshippers would be gathered from every tribe, and tongue, and nation. In the church, unity is not uniformity. But as we come together and see unity worked out in our churches in our lifetimes, we know that we see this only in a glimmer as well.

Oil and dew are one thing but to see God's plan unfold in Heaven, to know that Heaven will be a unity, a world of perfect unity and fellowship and love. The ultimate expression of unity is being shown as God brings together his people and unites them by his Holy Spirit because of the death and resurrection of that greater high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, ultimately, eradicates every sin that divides and disturbs true unity to bring his people, Jew and Gentile, into one body where Christ is all and is in all for all eternity, in perfect concord, and harmony, and peace, and unity is best described in those final words as life forever.

The worship, and the fellowship, and the joy that we will strive for in our local churches and that you share here in this church and in thousands of Christian churches gathered all over the face of this planet is a foretaste of the eternal life and praise we will have forever in the presence of Christ. So, when we go out of here, let's show them. Let's tell that news reporter, and our next door neighbor, and our unbelieving friends, and family members. Let's show them how beautiful unity is. Let's show them how powerful unity is. The church is a community surrounded and united around

the gospel. That's the basis for true spiritual unity. It is an experience that we taste in great measure but we will experience forever because that's what eternal life will be like.

Father, thank you for your truth. Your Word is truth. We know that you, oh God, are what makes unity so attractive. God, we won't be able to evangelize if we don't have unity around the gospel. We won't be able to enjoy sweet fellowship unless we live in the fear of the Lord wanting to obey your commandments. God, we won't know true unity unless we participate in the life of the body. And so, I pray for this new church, that one of the marks that they have as they walk together and witness and worship would be a love and a joy that I know they have. May it grow and grow as they care for one another, as they enjoy fellowship together. Thank you for these sweet people in this church. Help them to grow in their love for you each day, in Jesus' name. Amen.