

The Psalms of Ascents

A Mature Testimony of Life—Producing the Church Life for Brothers to Dwell in Unity (1)

Week 9 – Monday

Psa. 133

This message concludes our sharing on the last two Psalms of Ascents. The Psalms of Ascents go up from stage to stage starting from Psalm 120 and coming to the pinnacle in Psalms 133 and 134. These two Psalms describe the pinnacle of our experience of life. Psalm 133 talks about how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. This is related to maturity in life. When a group of brothers and sisters reach maturity in life, this brings oneness into the church life. While we are still young, we live in our flesh most of the time. Only when we reach a certain level of maturity in life can we experience oneness in God's divine life. Paul told the saints in Corinth that they were fleshly and children spiritually (1 Cor. 3:1). This is why the church life there was filled with troubles and problems. When we come to the church life, the most important thing is that we grow in life. We need to reach maturity in both faith and practice (Eph. 4:13-16).

Oneness is both in truth and in a certain stature of the growth in life. On one hand, we need to seek keep the oneness in the spirit; on the other hand, we need to seek the oneness of truth and life. Then the church will attain true oneness and have a mature testimony of life as portrayed in Psalm 133. This is not a psalm which you can simply pray-read and declare it and then attain to it. We all enjoy this psalm, "How good and how pleasant it is." While we are reading it we are very joyful, but the reality is not yet manifested among us. Why? Because we still are fleshly; we are still infants in the Lord. There is no way for us to produce oneness like this. This is why Psalm 133 is at the end of the Psalms of Ascents, not at the beginning. When a person follows the Lord to the end, this will produce the oneness with all the brothers and sisters. We look unto the Lord that He will lead us step by step until we reach such a beautiful end.

Psalm 133 is a mature testimony of life. As we live in the church life, we confront many troubles. Perhaps there is no oneness among us; perhaps there is much strife among us; perhaps there are many jealousies among us; perhaps there are many other troubles. What should we do? Do not be disappointed because this oneness is a something that we need to reach by passing through stage by stage. We must desire to grow with all the brothers and sisters in the church life until we reach to maturity, until we reach the fullness of the stature of Christ. We need to encourage one another to pursue the Lord. We lack many things, yet we need to tell the Lord, "Lord, we desire to gain You more and more." The entire Psalms of Ascents is like a picture in front of us for us to attain to so that each of us will strive to reach the goal that God has set before us.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 9 – Tuesday

1 John 4:20-21 – Footnote 20¹

In Psalm 132 we see that because the psalmist loves God, he cares for what God wants. He desires what satisfies God's heart. He would rather be ill-treated so that God's heart can be satisfied. This is a man who truly loves God. There is another advance in Psalm 133. The previous psalm is about loving God; this psalm is about loving the brothers. 1 John 4:20 tells us, "...for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" If a person loves God, he will also love God's children. If a person cares for God's things, he will also care for the things of his brothers. He will care for his brother's need and sacrifice himself in order to perfect his brothers.

If God can rest, then we can rest. If God cannot find rest with us, then we also cannot rest; this is a natural fact. To love God is the center and to love the brothers is the circumference. In order to love one another and dwell in unity, the secret is to love God. If we all can be encouraged by God's love and be touched by God's love, we will rise up to love God. The result naturally is to love our brothers and sisters. Therefore Psalm 133 is the mature testimony of the church life.

Psalm 133 begins, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!" The content of this Psalm is the expression of a mature life. It is not a momentary expression of our emotions. We always read this Psalm with a lot of feelings; we are touched and enjoy those feelings. These kinds of feelings and emotions are temporary, they do not count as the reality of this Psalm. To dwell together in unity means to dwell in oneness. Almost every epistle in the New Testament tells us that we must be in oneness. What God desires the most when we are together in the church life is that we would have this oneness among us. There must be the oneness for the church to be blessed.

The psalmist did not tell us to what extent is this goodness and pleasantness because it is so good and pleasant that it is impossible to describe. The word *good* in the Bible is different than our concept. Only things that can satisfy God's heart, that can accomplish God's purpose, that come from God and return back to God to God's praise and glory, can be considered good and pleasant. The root of the word *pleasant* in Hebrew is like a symphony which has many musical instruments. When it starts to play, it has all kind of sounds. Some of them are high and some of them are low, yet they are in harmony. The word *pleasant* denotes this kind of harmonious music. Those who hear it can sense comfort, peace and satisfaction. How pleasant it is for the brothers to dwell in unity.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 9 – Wednesday

Rev. 12:10-11 – Footnotes 11², 11³, 11⁴

Satan's work is to divide and destroy; as long as he can divide a church, he doesn't need to worry about it any more. The Bible tells us that Satan stands before God day and night to accuse us (Rev. 12:10). How can we stand before this accusation? There are three things that we can use to overcome his accusation. The first is the blood of the Lamb; the second is the word of our testimony; and the third is to be faithful unto death (v. 11). We will not love our soul-life even unto death. This kind of people will overcome Satan's accusation. Of course, we still have the Lord Jesus standing for us in the heavens to defend us. He is our great lawyer in the heavens. On the one hand, Satan accuses us; on the other hand, the Lord defends us. Praise the Lord! Therefore, we can overcome the accuser.

Still, the enemy will create some divisions among us and thus, destroy the oneness in the church. Thank the Lord that He opens our eyes to see through Satan's deceitfulness. So, we need to be diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit and also be diligent to grow to gain the oneness in life. Psalm 133 reflects a person who is mature in life. The more brothers and sisters who are mature in life there are in a church, the more the oneness will be produced in the church life.

What does it mean to dwell together in unity? Are you being one with me or am I being one with you? It is not a matter of you being one with me or me being one with you. It is that I disappear and you are gone; the only one left is Christ. Only Christ can produce oneness. When you and I both lose ourselves, we are no longer individualistic; we are brothers dwelling in unity. This is the expression of maturity of life. This is what God desires the most. If you ask Him what He desires the most in the church, He will answer that He desires the testimony of the oneness of the church. This is also the goal of God's work in us. He gave Himself to us; He dwells in us, and He wants to renew us and transform us until we are conformed to His image. He is bringing us to maturity from stage to stage, from step to step, until we reach this goal. Praise and thank the Lord!

If we still don't see this kind of condition in our church life, do not be disappointed because this should be the goal of our growth unto maturity. We must be clear that when the Lord is transforming us and working in us, when we are struggling to gain Him, then we will have this reality. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for the brothers to dwell in unity.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 9 – Thursday

Rev. 7:9 – Footnote 9¹

When David wrote this Psalm 133 in his prophesying spirit, he saw the One who is greater than him and who will be sitting on his throne, Christ. When He comes again, all those who were redeemed by Him will dwell in unity. They will be constituted into the Body and live out the body life. All the members will dwell in unity and care for one another in love so that God's name will be glorified.

Many of David's psalms prophecy concerning Christ. So, many of the psalms that he wrote are called the Psalms of the Messiah. God gave many revelations concerning Christ to David and they are revealed in the Psalms. It is worthwhile to study the psalms that reveal Christ. You would find out that they are so rich and all-encompassing. David was so pleasing to God because he cared for God's dwelling place. God could say, "This is a man after my heart because he knows what I want." This is why God revealed so many aspects concerning Christ to David and David wrote them in his psalms. Thus, there are many riches in the book of Psalms both of the revelation of Christ and of the experience of Christ, along with a description of the church life. It is hard for us to imagine that such a person who could give all these revelations existed in the Old Testament time. Psalm 133 is a beautiful picture that describes the church life to us. The church life needs to reach to a very high standard to match this psalm. God desires the church today to reach this standard of the brethren dwelling together in unity. We all saved by grace from different nations and different walks of life. We have different backgrounds, cultures, and walks of life, yet we come together. The church here includes saints from South America, North America, Asia, and Africa. How can people with such diverse backgrounds dwell together in unity? How can you attain such a beautiful standard? According to our natural man, according to our culture, according to our religious backgrounds, and according to our different walks of life, there is no way for us to be one. Suppose there are some Jewish believers who would join with the church in London, it seems that it would be impossible for us all to dwell together in unity.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 9 – Friday

Acts 10:44-45 – Footnote 44¹

In the age of the apostles, the gospel needed to be preached to the Gentiles. This was very difficult for the Jewish believers to do. Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 16:19). *Keys* is plural according to the word spoken by the Lord. This means that there was not only one key in his hand. On the day of Pentecost he opened the door to the Jews. The Holy Spirit poured down on the Jewish believers and baptized them into the Holy Spirit. The Lord later sent Peter to the Samaritans so that they also could receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). Philip was the one who had preached the gospel to the Samaritans, not Peter (v. 5), yet he still needed Peter to go to open the door to them. Even then, Peter had not finished using his keys, God wanted to send him to open many more doors to the Gentiles, but Peter delayed. He still had not opened any doors in the Gentile world after a few more years, so God used two great miracles to cause him to open the first door. First, He sent an angel to the house of Cornelius to tell him to send someone to the house where Peter was staying (Acts 10:1-8). Then, while Peter was in a trance, he saw a sheet descending from heaven holding all kinds of creatures including many unclean ones. Then a voice said to Peter, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat” (v. 13). What did Peter say? The heavens even opened up to speak to him, but Peter did not say, “Amen. Hallelujah!” He said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean” (v. 14). Here you see man’s concept; in Peter’s concept, he can only eat clean things even though the age had changed. The Lord said that he could eat all those animals but Peter said, “No” three times. After the sheet disappeared back into heaven, Peter remained there wondering what the vision meant (v. 17). While Peter was thinking about the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived and invited him to come to the house of Cornelius to preach the gospel. Then Peter understood that the vision that he saw was telling him to go, not just to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. The unclean animals referred to the Gentiles; in the eyes of the Jews the Gentiles are unclean so they would never eat together with them. If God simply told Peter to go to a house of Gentiles and be a guest there, he would never do it. After the vision, Peter went and brought a few witnesses with him because he knew that afterward he would need to face many Jewish brothers who would accuse him about eating with Gentiles and this did happen (Acts 11:1-3). This whole story shows that it is not easy for Christians to be in oneness because all these kinds of ordinances will become stumbling blocks to us. Peter had to testify in detail how the Holy Spirit led him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. One more thing is that when Peter went to the Gentiles, he wanted to give them a complete message but while he was speaking, the Holy Spirit did not wait. He descended on the Gentile believers and stopped Peter’s speaking (10:44-45). This shows how much God desired to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

The Psalms of Ascents

Week 9 – Saturday

John 17:11, 21-23

After Gentile believers were received into the church, there were debates in the church because some insisted that the Gentile believers should be circumcised. After the debates in Acts 15, the conclusion was that they did not need to be circumcised. Then Peter went to Antioch with Paul and Silas. He was very joyful when he saw how much the church there was blessed. He started to eat together with all the brothers and sisters including the Gentile ones. He forgot about everything; he just enjoyed with all the brothers and sisters. But while he was eating some brothers came from James, that is, from the church in Jerusalem. When Peter heard that they were coming, he separated himself from the Gentile believers. He did not dare to be seen eating with the Gentile believers (Gal. 2:10-11). This shows how easily culture and religious traditions can easily divide the saints in the church.

Today among us, if the Lord is merciful to us, we can arrive at the brothers dwelling together in unity; we can experience how good and how pleasant this is. This pleases God. In John 17, before the Lord departed, He prayed earnestly for the oneness of those He loved. This prayer is important; it must be fulfilled before the Lord comes again. But we can also see that remaining in oneness is a very big problem among God's children.

We all need to treasure and pay attention to the Lord's prayer in John 17. This prayer shows us that in order for the saints to be one, there are three aspects: first, we must be in the name of the Father through His eternal life that we all have within us since we believed. Second, we must be in the Triune God through the sanctification of the Word that sanctifies us. We need to treasure the Word of God and know how to apply it. We need to let the Word of God be reality to us so that we can be sanctified from all common things. Our God is holy and wants us also to be holy. How can we be sanctified? Through the word of the truth. On the one hand, the divine life makes us one. On the other, hand we have the word of the truth. Third, we must be in the glory of God expressing the Triune God. When we touch God's glory we will express God Himself. In other words, we will let God live out through us to express His glory. Then we will attain to true and genuine oneness. This oneness is not outward, but rather it is inward; it is in the spirit, it is in God's divine life, and it is in God's glory. Only this kind of oneness is real and genuine. This is the deepest longing that the Lord had before He left the

Earth. This is also His desire for His people for the last 2,000 years.

Today we have about a hundred people here; this is very few. Yet we see what God wants, what is in God's heart. We can see that what God desires is to build His house in spirit. We are willing to offer up ourselves for this just as David did in his care for the building of God's dwelling place. He offered everything that He had for the building of God's dwelling place (1 Chron. 29:2-5) and inspired God's people to also offer willingly (vv. 6-9). We also need to be diligent to seek to grow in life so that God can gain the real oneness in life among us. This is God's commitment to us and we must willingly offer up ourselves for this.