

Psalm 134

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Date: 01 November 2020

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening.

We're going to begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise. The psalm that we're looking at this evening is Psalm 134. It's a very short psalm so I think what we'll do is we'll sing both Psalm 133 and 134, both psalms of ascent.

So we'll sing Psalm 133 followed by 134 which gives us five stanzas in total. Behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well together such as brethren are in unity to dwell.

Like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow, even Aaron's beard, and to the skirts that of his garments go. As Herman's Jew, the Jew that doth on Sion's hills descend, for there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end.

Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye, that his attendants are, even you, that in God's temple be, and praise him nightly there. Your hands within God's holy place lift up and praise his name.

[1 : 22] From Sion Hill the Lord thee bless, that heaven and earth did frame. So we'll sing these verses and after we've sung this psalm, Angus Alec Morrison will lead us in prayer in Gaelic.

Behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well together such as brethren are in unity to dwell.

Like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow, Even Aaron's beard and to the skirts did off his garments go.

As Herman's Jew, the Jew that doth on Sion's hills descend, For there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end.

Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye, that his attendants are, even you, that in God's temple be, And praise him nightly there.

[3 : 28] Your hands within God's holy place lift up and praise his name.

From Sion Hill the Lord thee bless, that heaven and earth did frame.

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[6 : 07] Here, water flows from about three hours. Here, water flows from, and here, water flows from, andocate the EU to make their land.

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Amen. Let's turn now to the psalm that we sang. We turned to Psalm 134, and we'll read all of this short psalm.

I'm reading in the authorised version, the King James Version this evening. A song of degrees, or a song of ascents. Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord, lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord, the Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.

Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We'll pray for a moment as we turn back to the scriptures. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this evening, and we thank you for your word, which we have read and which we have sung.

[15 : 31] We thank you, Lord, that we are able to unite our hearts in prayer. We are able to, in our separate homes, unite our voices in praise.

We thank you, Lord, that you give us the opportunity and the freedom and the desire to bless your name. And we thank you that as we come together, in the name of Jesus, we are promised that you will meet with us.

Even if it's only two or three, we have the promise that you will be there and there to bless. And we pray that as we would seek to bless you, as we would seek to praise your name this evening, that we would know your presence and that we would know the blessing of God with us and upon us.

So help us, Lord, in this hour we pray to understand what you are saying to us, enable us to hear your voice speaking into our lives, and give us the faith, we pray, to be able to hear and understand and believe and respond in a way that is appropriate, in a way that brings glory to your name.

And what we pray for ourselves in this service, we pray also for the young ones who will meet at YF just shortly. We thank you for those who teach them. We thank you, Lord, for the group who gather online.

[16 : 56] And we ask that you would bless them, those who are following you, Lord, that they would know that encouragement of being with your people. And those who are not yet following you, we pray that you would be seeking them and that you would cause these young ones to remember and to trust their Creator in the days of their youth.

So be near to us, we pray. On your day, may we be in the Spirit and may we know that you are God and that you are with us. Help us, Lord, we pray.

Pour out your Spirit upon us, we pray. We ask this in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. One of the things about this period where we've been unable to meet physically together that has actually been a real encouragement has been the Wednesday night prayer meeting.

Particularly, I'm thinking about the young ones. When we met here in the hall, there was a few, not very many, but there was a few young ones who would meet in the actual physical prayer meeting.

But of late on Wednesday evenings, we see lots of young ones coming in for a time of prayer before the main meeting and some of them staying over. And we see them and we hear them in the prayer meeting where we all gather together for that time of prayer.

[18 : 27] And I remember as a young boy, the age that some of them are, listening to older people pray. And I remember that as they prayed, some of the things that they prayed, I understood and could enter into.

And there were other things that the old elders would pray that I struggled to understand. There were things that puzzled me. And one thing that always puzzled me was when an old elder would say to God in prayer, we bless thee, Lord.

We bless you, Lord. And I used to think in my own little mind, how can that be possible? How can we bless God?

Yes, he blesses us. And we understand that from a very young age. We understand that the things that we enjoy are a blessing from God, from the water in our taps to the food on our plates, the health and the strength that we enjoy, the things that we have, the homes, the comforts that we enjoy.

These are good gifts. They're blessings from God. I understood that he blesses us, but how can we bless God? That was my question.

[19 : 51] And that's a question I want to pick back up and think about a little, some 40 or so years later. Because it's a question that's addressed within this psalm.

Various points this evening. And the first point that we come to this evening is this call to behold the Lord. Point number one is we're to behold the Lord.

Now at this moment in time, if we walk through Tarbert and if we walk alongside the harbour, where the construction work is ongoing, there's health and safety signs everywhere.

We're being told to look out for obstructions. We're being told to watch out for risks and hazards. We're being told to pay attention because we're just on the threshold of a construction site.

And these signs are there for a purpose. These signs are there to keep us safe, sensible that we should see these signs telling us to watch out, to behold. One thing that's peculiar about some of the more modern translations in respect of this psalm is that they miss out the first word.

[21 : 11] both the NIV and the ESV, they take down the sign that the psalmist has put up at the beginning of Psalm 134.

That's why we're reading the King James Version tonight. The opening word of Psalm 134 is the same opening word as in Psalm 133.

And it's the word behold. Which is, now that we are saying, look, pay attention. And so we see in this psalm as it begins, there's this call to behold the Lord.

And there's two things I want to note within that. First of all, that call to behold the Lord, that sign, that arresting sign the psalm begins with, it's designed to stir up the believers.

This is a call, it's a sign that's designed, first of all, to stir up the believers. Spurgeon notes that with this word behold, the pilgrims stir up the holy brotherhood.

[22 : 18] They stir up one another. They stir up the brothers. And sometimes we need that, don't we? Sometimes we need to be stirred up a little in order to bless the Lord, in order to come in and worship.

Psalm 103, verse 1, comes to mind. O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless.

So as we come together this evening, I pray that we'll be stirred up from the moment the psalm begins, that we'll be stirred up to worship God.

And perhaps we should ask ourselves the question, when did we last, like the psalmist here, seek to stir someone else up to bless the Lord?

It's often not good to be one who stirs, but there is a good kind of stirring. And the good kind of stirring is when we stir one another up to bless the Lord.

[23 : 33] So there's a stirring up of the believers in this opening call to behold. And there's also a shout to the believers. It's the second thing to note within this first point.

There's a shout to the believers. Spurgeon also notes that these pilgrims, they shout to their brothers, behold. And that speaks to us of urgency.

Speaks to us of the importance of what's been entered into here. When we hear of a call out of the fire service, then when we speak to Cammie and others who are involved in that, they talk about a fire shout.

When there's a signal that goes out that somebody's house is on fire and they need help, then the fire brigade are those who receive a shout, not a whisper.

They don't get a kind of cool message. It's a shout because it's an urgent thing. It requires an urgent response. And this word, behold, there's urgency in it.

[24 : 44] There's importance in it. It's a shout to the brothers. And often again, in terms of our being called to worship God, we need that shout.

Some people, when they pick up a phone and they start to text or they go on to social media or whatever, they don't see anything else or hear anybody else in the room.

And if you want to get their attention, you need to shout. You know, other folks, when they open a book and they start to read, they enter the world of this book and they're oblivious to everything around them.

And if you want to grab their attention, you need to shout. Or think about people with headphones on, especially the young folks. The headphones go on, they're listening to their tunes, they hear nothing.

You can shout from a distance that dinner's on the table, but if you want their attention, you really have to go up close and you have to shout. And sometimes that's what God has to do with us.

[25 : 56] And sometimes it's in our circumstances, it's in providence. He pulls us away from the things that we were once so fixated on. Or he removes from us, from our hearing, the voices of those who once had such an influence over us.

He prizes idols out of our hands that have such possession of us. And he says to us, he shouts to us, Behold! Look to me.

And other times, it's through his word. Not so much providence, but it's as we're in God's word. There are verses when we open a chapter and they're jumping off the page at us.

There are sermons and devotional books that seem to be so pointed towards the details of our lives. And it's as if God is shouting in our direction, Behold!

Look to me. And that's how this psalm begins. There's that call to behold the Lord, to be looking to the Lord.

[27 : 10] We need to be looking to the Lord. Isaiah 45 and verse 22 says, Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth for I am God and there is none else.

Is that what God is shouting to us at this time? There's a global pandemic that's arresting all the ends of the earth.

And perhaps within this, the Lord is saying to us, Behold! Look to me! Be ye saved! You know, our devices that we're so often in, they won't save us.

Our friends can't save us. Our family can't save us. The celebrities or sports personalities that may have such an influence over our lives can't save us.

We needn't look to them. But we need to look to the Lord Jesus to behold him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[28 : 30] So the first point here in this psalm is we're to behold the Lord. The second point we come to here is that we're to bless the Lord.

Still in verse 1, Behold! Bless ye the Lord. So, let's go back to my question as a five or six year old. How do we bless the Lord?

How do we bless the Lord? He blesses us, yes, we understand that, but how do we bless the Lord? Is there anything that we have that we can give to him that he does not have?

Is there anything that we can give to him that will bring some material gain to God? Well, no. And he's the fount of every blessing.

So he's in need of nothing. There's nothing we can give to him that he does not already have. You know, is there any is there any mood or status change in God that we can affect by turning our attention towards him?

[29 : 41] Again, no. He changes not. He's not like us. He isn't affected in mood or status by the things around him. He is constant. He is unchanging.

Is there something that we can add to God or take away from God that will bring some improvement to him? Again, no, there isn't. He is perfect. Eternally perfect in every way.

There's nothing we can give to God. There's nothing we can do for God that will cause him to be better off than he was before. There's nothing more. So what does it mean to bless the Lord?

Alec Mateer, the Old Testament scholar, says to bless the Lord is to review gratefully what he is and to respond in worship.

Spurgeon says to bless the Lord is to think well of Jehovah and speak well of him. Adore him with reverence, draw near to him with love, delight in him with exultation.

[30 : 54] That's what it means to bless the Lord according to these commentators. And that's what we were made to do. That's our purpose. That's why we were created.

We were created to bless the Lord, to respond and worship to him, to think well of him, to speak well of him, to adore him with reverence, to draw near to him with love, to delight in him with exultation.

It's what we were made to do, to bless the Lord. If we rewind back to the morning when we were in Genesis, we go back to the garden before the fall, we see Adam and Eve and they're blessing the Lord in that garden with grateful hearts.

They're thinking well of God, they're speaking well of God, they're walking in the cool of the garden and communion with God, they're adoring him, they're drawing near to him, they're in that relationship of love and delight and that's what God created them for.

That's where they found joy. And that's what God created us for. And that's where we find joy.

[32 : 08] Man's chief end is to glorify God, to bless the Lord and enjoy him forever. The devil's first lie was to tell Eve that to live a life of blessing the Lord was somehow going to be a life that would be unfulfilling and impoverished and poor and sad.

The serpent says to Eve as he comes to her in the garden, you know, you can do better than this. Why be with God when you can be like God?

You can be God in fact. Why give him the glory, says the serpent? Why not seek it for yourself? Wouldn't that be more enjoyable?

And that's the proud thought that actually caused Satan first to fall from heaven. If you want to see this, you can go to Isaiah chapter 14 for a moment.

Isaiah 14 is thought to be a picture of when the devil fell from heaven. It says in verse 12, How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning.

[33 : 36] How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations. For you have said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.

This is the devil speaking, the commentators think. I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the furthest sides of the north.

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the most high. Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the pit.

That was the sinful attitude that caused Satan to fall, and that was the sinful, proud spirit that Satan sought to plant in Eve in the garden.

And then Eve and Adam, as they began to imagine themselves in God's place, thought, well, maybe that will be a better life. And so in that act of rebellion that we looked at this morning, they sought to glorify self, not God, and in that awful moment when they sinned, they discovered that all the joy they knew in the garden was gone.

[35 : 10] You know, con men go from house to house with the same tricks. Scammers, they phone house after house with the same deceitful words.

They send email after email with the same false story, trying to cause us to fall into the trap. And the devil, he's the great deceiver.

He whispered to Eve, you will lose so much if you trust and obey God. Go on, taste a different way, taste my way, it's better, it's sweeter.

But the moment she tasted, it wasn't sweet, it was bitter. You know, perhaps there's someone who's listening in this evening and God is calling you to behold him, to look to him.

And God is calling you to bless his name, to draw near to him and to trust him, to worship him, and you hear his call. But the devil is spinning you the same yarn that he spun to Eve.

[36 : 25] He's saying follow Jesus and you'll lose so much. There's so many things that you can't do, there's so many places that you can't go, there's rules and regulations that will just suffocate you and will bind you up in a miserable existence.

That's what the devil says. It's all lies. Well, it's mainly lies. The devil's subtle, he laces lies with truth.

And for you and I, the reality is that following Jesus means that we do lose some things. There are things that we may have done before that do need to stop.

There are places that once we frequented that we have to leave behind. We may lose money, that's true. We may lose friends, we may lose a reputation in the world, we may even lose our lives in some places if we bless the Lord, but we gain so much more than we lose.

Jimmy Elliot, the missionary who lost his life on the mission field, in his diary, October 28th, he wrote, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

[37 : 55] And Elliot's calling and our calling is a calling to bless the Lord. And it's no life of misery, it's a life of joy in time in this world.

And it leads to an existence of perfect and broken joy for all eternity. John 10, 10, Jesus said, the thief, the devil, comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they, that we, if we're trusting in Christ, may have life and have it to the full.

If you want to know fullness of life, you want to know what real joy tastes like, then we find it as we seek to bless the Lord.

So we're to behold the Lord, we're to bless the Lord. Thirdly, here, we're to build each other up in the Lord. And let's just think about the context of this psalm for a moment.

[39 : 08] This is a song of degrees, it says here in the AV. It's a song of ascents, is the term that we've been using to think about these psalms. As the pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem, to that place of worship, they had this song book.

These psalms from Psalm 120 to Psalm 134, are the psalms that the pilgrims sang as they were en route to Zion to worship the Lord.

There's psalms which give us a picture of what the journey looked like as they went to that place of worship. You know, we have playlists for long journeys in the car, for road trips, and this was the playlist for God's pilgrims.

There were happy songs, there were sad songs within this little psalm book, songs that spoke about struggles and fears, there were songs which speak about hopes and anticipations, the hopes and anticipations of God's people.

And here in this psalm, the last of this group of psalms, Psalm 134, the pilgrims have arrived in Jerusalem. It's night time it seems. So what will they do?

[40 : 32] We can try and imagine the scene as they arrive in Jerusalem. After potentially a long and difficult journey, eventually they've arrived.

They've come to the place of worship, they've come to that point where they're able to go to the place of worship and worship the Lord. But it's late. And we can imagine maybe the kids are tired and a bit cranky.

they still have to unpack their bags. They're a bit hungry and they need some supper. We can imagine the conversation. Will we go straight out to the place of worship?

Maybe we'll give the evening of service a miss. Maybe we'll just leave things till the morning. But no, what we find here is that even though it's night, they go directly to the place of worship.

And when they arrive there, they find the church is not locked up. The servants of the Lord are there. They're praising God and song and music.

[41 : 47] They were always there. The servants of the Lord in verse 1 was a reference to the Levites who had the responsibility of guarding and caring for the tabernacle and overseeing the worship, the musical side of worship.

1 Chronicles 9 and verse 33 says, those who were musicians, heads of Levite families, stayed in the rooms of the temple and were exempt from other duties because they were responsible for the work day and night.

And so as these pilgrims arrive in the temple, at night, the place is not vacated, the place is full of these servants of God. They lived in the place of worship, they were never off duty, they were responsible for the work day and night.

Their whole lives were devoted to worship of God. And I think as we look at these Levites, these servants of the Lord, it's a good picture for us to learn from if we're Christians, our whole lives are to be lived out in worship.

We don't go on call and off call as Christians. We don't go from the mode of worship to the mode of work. We're not in one state of mind and heart when we are going about our secular duties and a different state of mind and heart when we come to the place of worship.

[43 : 23] No, we are always continually servants of the Lord, ambassadors for Christ. And so we see here, these servants of the Lord, they're in the tabernacle, they're in the temple, they're leading worship.

And this pilgrim family, we can imagine them in our mind's eye entering the door of the place of worship, and they greet the servants of the Lord. So what do they say?

Well, they say, bless the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. And you get a sense of the enthusiasm on the part of the pilgrims.

This for them likely was a spiritual high point. It likely was just an annual visit to the temple for when they arrive there, they're full of enthusiasm.

Bless ye the Lord, they say, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. There's great enthusiasm in this greeting.

[44 : 33] But maybe for the ministers, for the servants of the Lord, you know, who lived 24-7 in the place of worship, this was just another day.

In fact, we see here it wasn't just another day, it was, this was the night shift. And very little perhaps happened on the night shift. Things were quieter.

The servants of the Lord could become tired and jaded at night. One could get discouraged. And so this outburst of praise may have been a challenge to the ministers, to the servants of the Lord, but certainly it would have brought, and it did bring encouragement.

It built up the servants of the Lord. It reminded them of the privilege of worship. And I think probably we realize now that to be able to come together in worship, to be able to enter the place of worship, to be able to meet together as God's people, it is a privilege.

And when we actually do it, we're very much encouraged. When we come together in the place of worship, and as we greet each other and say to each other, bless you the Lord, there is huge encouragement and there is a huge sense of us being built up in the Lord.

[46 : 10] So let's not take this privilege for granted again. Let's not take this privilege of being able to come together and worship for granted again.

And until the doors physically do open, let's take every opportunity we have to seek to encourage each other, to build each other up in the Lord.

Lord. So we're to behold the Lord, we're to bless the Lord, we're to seek to build each other up in the Lord.

And the fourth thing here is we're to be in prayer. Verse 2, lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord. Now when we go off to Keswick in July most years, obviously we weren't able to do that this year, but when we go off to Keswick to this big Christian gathering, I always see people around me who are lifting up their hands during worship.

Is that what this means in the psalm? Are we to lift up our hands physically when we are in the sanctuary? Is that what it means to bless the Lord, that we're to physically lift up our hands?

[47 : 29] Well, I don't think that's necessarily what it means at all. There's nothing wrong with lifting up our hands in praise and worship, but I think this is more a verse that speaks to us in terms of our heart rather than our hands.

And to lift up our hands, yes, it speaks about praise, but it speaks even more so about prayer. Calvin says in verse 2, the expression lift up your hands refers to prayer.

And so we're called here, in the psalm to be those who are in prayer. 1 Timothy 2.8 says, I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer.

Remember when Jesus came into the temple in Matthew 21, remember the indignation that was within him. As he looked around the temple and he saw all this activity within the temple but there was no prayer.

And he said to them, Matthew 21, 13, it is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers. And so these pilgrims, as they speak to the servants of the Lord, they say to them, to encourage them, to challenge them, to direct them, they say, lift up your hands in prayer.

[49 : 04] And it was a word to them back then and it's a word to us here and now. We're all called to be servants of the Lord. And one of the ministries that God has given to all of us is prayer.

We're to be in prayer. There's many things just now that we're not able to do. There's many things that were going on in the church, good things that we're just not able to continue with our prayers.

Kids clubs and toddlers clubs and community lunches and congregational meals, these are things that we love to do, but we're not able to do them anymore.

The one thing that we can do and we must be steadfast in doing is those who are in prayer. So we're to be in prayer, that's the fourth point here.

The final point in the psalm is that we are to be encouraged. Be encouraged is the final point.

[50 : 11] As we see these pilgrims who have journeyed all the way to the place of worship, entering into the place of worship, they give encouragement.

They give encouragement to the servants of the Lord. But as they spend time in worship, in the sanctuary, and as they leave the place of worship, they are given encouragement.

As they come in, they give encouragement out. But as they remain in, and as they go from the place of worship, they are given encouragement.

They are those who come in to the place of worship to bless the Lord. Lord. But as they are leaving, they are those who are receiving the Lord's blessing.

Verse 3, the Lord that made heaven and earth, bless thee out of Zion. They're leaving with the Lord's blessing.

[51 : 14] And what an encouragement that would have been for these weary pilgrims, who almost certainly at times felt so small and who were often so vulnerable and so much under attack, how much it would have thrilled their souls to know that the Lord who made heaven and earth was giving them his blessing.

Eveson, the commentator, says, the one who made heaven and earth, how amazing that such a God against whom we have rebelled should bless us.

And Derek Kidner, the commentator, says the word bless is perhaps the keynote of the psalm, sounded as it is in each verse. So far, it has been directed God worked.

Now, it returns from God to man. But the exchange, says Kidner, is quite unequal. to bless God is to acknowledge gratefully what he is.

But to bless man, God must make him what he is not and give him what he has not. Let me read that last sentence again.

[52 : 39] To bless God is to acknowledge gratefully what he is. but to bless man, God must make him what he is not and give him what he has not.

And we must ask the question as we finish, how is that possible? How is it possible for the holy God of heaven and earth to bless us?

How is it possible when we, how is it possible for us who are sinners, who are under the curse of sin, to receive the blessing of God?

And the answer to that, it takes us back to where we were in the morning, the answer is Jesus. he took sin's curse from us and through his finished work on the cross, he offers God's blessing to us.

He became what we are, sin, in order that we could become what he is, righteous, in and through him.

[54 : 06] And we see that great exchange on the cross, 2 Corinthians 5, 21, isn't it? God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we, through him, could be made righteous in him.

What an encouragement that was for them as they left the place of worship to know that they were leaving with God's blessing.

And what an encouragement it is for us to think about the blessing of God purchased for us by Christ on the cross and offered to us freely in his grace.

and we'll sing of that blessing now as we conclude. as the light of my soul, oh, my soul, worship his holy name.

Sing thy glory for all my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

[55 : 40] The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning, it's time to sing your song again.

Whatever may pass, I'm whatever lies before me. Let me be singing when the evening comes, as light of my soul, oh, my soul, worship his holy name.

Sing thy glory before, oh, my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

Your rich in love and your soul to honor, your name is great and your heart is kind, for all your goodness I will keep on singing, ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

Bless the Lord, oh, my soul, oh, my soul, worship his holy name.

[57 : 15] Sing like never before, oh, my soul, I worship your holy name.

And on that day when my strength is failing, the angels hear and my time has come, still my soul, sing your praise song and day, ten thousand years and then forever more.

Bless the Lord, oh, my soul, oh, my soul, worship his holy name.

Sing like never before, all my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

Till I've never before, oh, my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

[58 : 34] I will worship your holy name. worship your holy name.

And we'll finish now with the blessing, the benediction from Numbers 6 and verse 24. The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen.