

# Life Together

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Preacher: Calum Cameron

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, we're now going to, for a short while, think about the words we just read. The words we just sung, Sam 1-3-3. So if you have a Bible and you want to follow along, you might find it helpful to have an open Sam 1-3-3 page 519.
- So as I mentioned earlier, if you're visiting with us or if you've been away for a while, in our Sunday evenings here in St. Columbas, we've been going through these Psalms, what are called the Songs of a Sense.
- Psalms 120-134. And as we've been thinking, these are songs, they're Psalms that God's people would sing as they made that pilgrimage, as they travelled up to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the salvation of Yahweh, of their God.
- But at the same time, we've been thinking about the fact that these songs are our songs. They're songs for the church today, they're songs for God's people today.
- The Bible sometimes puts the Christian life into the language of a journey that we're pilgrims, we're travellers. And the Songs of a Sense we've been thinking about are essentially a road trip playlist for that journey.
- [ 1 : 1 2 ] And as we've gone through them, we've seen that these songs, they encapsulate a wide range of human emotion and experience. There are songs for safety and security for when you're fearful.
- There are songs for when you're overflowing with joy and happiness. And there are songs for when you're feeling miserable and you're down in the depths of life.
- This evening, we're moving on to the final part in our series, Psalm 133. And with some of the songs we've been looking at, we've had to really dig deep to unpack the main theme and figure out what the Psalms are really all about.
- But there are some Psalms, I think, that it's blatantly obvious what the main theme is. And if you look at Psalm 133, I think it hits you right in the face from verse 1. Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity.
- So we're thinking a bit this evening, just for the next few minutes, about unity in Psalm 133. And if you find it helpful to have an outline for how we're going to think about it, we're going to look at it like this.
- [ 2 : 1 7 ] First of all, we're going to think about the problem of division. Secondly, we're going to think about the power of unity and then finally, briefly, the promise of life forevermore.
- So first of all, the problem of division. Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity. The reality is that unity is something, I think, in the church we so often take for granted.
- It's definitely a substance, a commodity that we think about more when it's not there. For example, just to illustrate that, there are so many things in our lives we take for granted when they work.
- I'm sure you can think of certain things you really only actually think about when they break and when things go wrong. For example, that's the case with me in my car. Every day I get in my car, I turn on the ignition, I put it in the gear and I drive off.

And I don't really think about the inner workings of the engine. I don't think about the pistons and the fuel pumps and the head gasket and all these other car terms, I have no idea what they mean.

[ 3 : 19 ] But it's when you hear that worrying noise or you see that ominous light on the dashboard come on. It's then that you start to think about the engine. Another example, I think, is the idea of Wi-Fi.

I think so many of us are connected on our phones, our laptops, our computers at home. And whenever we're using our phone or our laptop and we're doing whatever we do on the internet, we're on Netflix or we're checking the news or whatever it is we're doing, checking emails, we're not really thinking about the radio waves that are being transmitted across the network by our router or the servers that we're connecting to on the other end.

One final example, think about oxygen. Now oxygen for some people today is probably close to Wi-Fi in terms of something that's critical to our existence as human beings.

But how many of us actually think intentionally about the oxygen we have in the air around us? Apparently, the average human being takes 12 to 18 breaths a minute.

That means we're taking over 20,000 breaths each day. And we don't consciously think about the oxygen around us, but it's so vital, it's so critical to our existence. I'm pretty sure we'd be quick to notice if the oxygen was suddenly tainted or if it dissipated in the air around us.

[ 4 : 37 ] And yet so often I think we have this kind of attitude to unity in the church. We take it for granted. We don't really think about how valuable and how critical it is to our continued existence as Christians.

We don't think about unity until it's not there or until it's been disrupted. And unity is absolutely critical for God's people. And think about the context of the Psalms we've been looking at, Psalm 1 through 3.

This one is a Psalm of David. And we don't know exactly when David wrote this Psalm, but there were many times in David's life when he experienced a lack of unity, when he experienced division and conflict and battles.

There were times in David's life when the unity of God's people was completely shattered. His own family, his children, they would go on to split the kingdom up, north and south.

There would be this bitter enmity between God's people, splits, divisions, conflict, disunity. And we see as we look through the Bible that the roots of that disunity, the roots of that division is always sin.

[ 5 : 44 ] Sin brings division. Sin sets people against each other. It sows seeds of discord and opposition. And if we go all the way back to Genesis 3, we see that sin right at the beginning effectively is a sin that disrupts unity.

It's a sin that takes away that unity between human beings and God and unity with each other. And as a result, when we look at our world, we see division in so many different ways.

Throughout human history, we see a world that is divided, a world that's in conflict. Human history illustrates this. Every era of human history has been marked by war and conflict.

See, despite the best attempts, the best endeavors of the United Nations and attempts at peacemaking, there's never really been a time in our world where humanity has united as one people.

We've maybe had pictures of it. We've maybe had glimpses at unity. But we've never really experienced it. In the time of the New Testament, we had what was called the Pax Romana, the Roman piece.

- [ 6 : 51 ] This is when most of the civilized world was united together under one empire. But even that unity was flawed. It was imperfect. It was held together by brute force.
- And ultimately, it didn't last. So really, our starting point here is that we live in a world that is marked by division. Division is a constant reality.
- And that's true in our own lives. It's true in our own experiences. Maybe many of us here this evening have experienced divisions with our family. It's painful. It's hard.
- Maybe you experienced division in the workplace. Maybe your workplace is the polar opposite of a united place to work.
- David, the guy who wrote this, Sam, knew all about division. Now, what this means is that unity is extremely, extremely valuable.
- [ 7 : 44 ] Unity is extremely precious. This is what leaves David to say in verse one, behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity.
- And I want to think secondly about this, Sam, what it's teaching us about the power of that unity. Read verse two. David goes on to say, it's like the precious oil on the head running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes.
- It is like the dew of hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. So we're going to unpack those two similes in just a second. I want to begin just by saying that there's real power in unity.
- And just to illustrate that, maybe you've been watching the World Cup. It's been hard to avoid over the last couple of weeks. It's been exciting. It's been unpredictable. We've seen lots of teams that are full of talented individuals like Germany, Brazil, Spain, and Portugal.
- They all crashed out of the tournament. And often the problem with these teams, the way they've been playing, is they've not been playing as a team. There's been good individuals, but they've not been united together.
- [ 8 : 54 ] But at the same time, we've seen teams like Russia have actually really exceeded expectations. They've done really well. They've got to the quarterfinals. Russia I think was rated like 80th in the world before the World Cup.
- Nobody really gave them a chance. They're not great individuals. But there was something about them, they clicked. They had this fantastic chemistry and team spirit, and it showed. They worked together.
- They were on the same page. They supported each other. The point is there is real power in unity. And the Bible tells us that in a similar way, there is an incredible power when it comes to Christian unity.
- And I want to think about that in Psalm 133 in two ways very briefly. First of all, if you look at verse two, the picture of the oil running down the beard of Aaron.
- I wonder if someone came up to you today and asked you to describe the unity of the church if that would be your instinctive response. Well, you know, it's like the oil that runs down the beard of Aaron.
- [ 9 : 54 ] It's a hard image to get our head around. Initially, it sounds maybe fairly odd, very abstract in our culture that we live in today.
- But it's worth thinking about. See, in the ancient New East, in the culture that David lived in, precious oil was fragrant. It was considered attractive. It was distinctive.
- And I think part of the point of verse two, what it's getting at is that when you have people living in unity, when God's people are truly living together as one, it's like a distinctive aroma.

It's like a scent that is attractive to people when they see it. And the second part of this image, I think, is that in the Bible, anointing with oil in the Old Testament was a clear picture for being set apart.

It was a clear picture for someone who is different. Aaron and the priests, they were anointed with oil over their heads in Leviticus to show that they were different, to show that they'd been set apart to represent God in his world.

[ 10 : 56 ] So I think there's two things going on here with this image of the oil. The first is that true unity, when it happens, is distinctive in that it stands out in this divided world that we live in.

The Bible says that God's people are set apart to be different. Each one of us today is to represent God in his world, much like the priests in the Old Testament Levitical system.

The New Testament gives us another lens on this kind of distinctive unity. You might be able to get this on the screens, John 17 from verse 20. Jesus is praying here for those who will follow him.

He says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them, even as you loved me.

[ 12 : 07 ] In other words, one aspect of Christian unity is its distinctive nature, that unity is something that points others to what Jesus has done.

It's distinctive, it's attractive, it stands out. When we are united, we point people to Jesus. We hope, I think we pray that here at St. Columbus, the sense of community we have, the sense of family, the sense of togetherness, although it's maybe not perfect, we hope that it does that.

We're not united for the sake of being united, but we're united to point others to our Saviour. There's something different about Christian unity. The power of Christian unity, first of all, is that it's distinctive, it stands out.

Secondly, I think Sam 1 through 3 is saying that Christian unity is diverse. We see this, I think, in verse 3. It goes on to say, unity is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.

Again, it probably wouldn't be one of the first images that would come into your mind if you were to describe Christian unity. Again, it requires some thinking about.

[ 13 : 16 ] Hermon is a mountain north of Israel, which is now in modern-day Syria. Mount Zion is really speaking about Jerusalem. It's where the city of God dwells with his people in the south.

There are really, I think, a picture of opposites. This is what Tim Keller says. He says, the unity of God's people brings opposites together. This is symbolized by tall Hermon in the rural north and the little hill of Zion in the urban south.

For the dew of Mount Hermon to fall on Mount Zion would be a miracle. In the same way, so is the supernatural bond that brings people far divergent and different in culture, race, and class together in Jesus Christ.

In other words, the gospel breaks down barriers. It brings divided people together. It brings opposites together. We see this developed in the New Testament.

Paul is big on this. He says in Galatians 3, 28, there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

[ 14 : 25 ] When we think about unity and we think about unity here in St. Columbus, we know that. We're surrounded probably by people who are in many ways different to us. We're probably from different backgrounds, different life stages.

Maybe we have different hobbies and interests, but we're united together by one gospel as one people in an incredible, incredible way. And that diversity of unity is true, not just here locally in St. Columbus, but it's true across the world.

We believe in one church. We believe in one body, one holy Catholic church as the Apostles Creed puts it. That's Catholic with a small C as in universal.

I want to read a few verses that are maybe helpful here from 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Again, we might have it on the screen. 1 Corinthians chapter 12, reading from verse 12. For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit. So the body does not consist of one member, but of many.

[ 15 : 40 ] If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. Nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And on those parts of the body that we think less honourable, we bestow the greater honour.

And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the whole body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

[ 16 : 49 ] If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now, you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

And I think the key point from that text anyway, is that unity, that the body is something being built together by God. God is the one who puts the body together.

And I think the idea that unity comes from God, I think it's there in the background of Psalm 133. There's a word that keeps popping up, it doesn't really come through so much in our translations, but in the Hebrew, the same word is there three times in each verse.

The idea of the oil running down on the beard, running down on the collar of his robes, which is falling on the mountain's iron, it's the same word, it's the same Hebrew word.

And I think the idea is that unity is something that descends, something that is a blessing given from above. And what that means is that we don't need to work hard to become one body.

[ 17 : 48 ] The challenge is not for us to kind of manufacture unity. Unity is something we have from God.

Joni Erickson Tadda, the woman who had an accident and broke her neck and was paralyzed, I think from the shoulders down, written a lot of really helpful, tremendous books.

Her life itself is an incredible testimony. She said this, believers are never told to become one. We already are one, but we are expected to act like it.

And I think there's a challenge there in those words. Our status is we are the body of Christ. We are objectively one body. We are united.

The church is not a bunch of individuals each doing their own thing. We are called the body of Christ and we should reflect that. But maybe we look at the church locally, globally, and we just don't see it.

[ 18 : 46 ] Maybe we see a whole range of denominations and sects and fragments of a church. And maybe we struggle to find a sense of unity.

Maybe we don't see the unity Jesus speaks about or the unity we read about in this Psalm. I think it's true that despite our status as one body, as a people united in Jesus Christ, in the kind of practical outworking of that, we so often fall short.

We so often lack that sense of unity. And David, the guy who wrote this Psalm, he knew that in his own experience. There's a tragic irony in the life of David.

He writes, behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. And shortly after his lifespan, the kingdom is divided in two. It's split. Unity is gone.

There's a guy, a Protestant reformer who's often associated with divisions and splits called Martin Luther in the 16th century. And a lot of people think of this guy and they just think this is a guy who's all about dividing and splitting within the church.

[ 19 : 53 ] But Martin Luther said this. He said, to gather together with God's people, with one another, in united adoration of God the Father, is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer.

It's profoundly important. Unity is absolutely critical to the Christian life. Not only is it a biblical imperative, it's something that we need.

We really need one another. We need the support. We need the love, the care, the prayers of each other. I was on Christ this morning, but I gathered Derek was saying something to this effect.

We need each other for that kind of support, for that kind of encouragement, for that kind of community in this life that we live. The Christian life, the journey that we're thinking about in these Psalms is not intended to be a solo effort.

Okay, so we thought about the problem of division, the power of unity. Thirdly, and finally, I want to think about the promise of life. Just very briefly, look at the last line of this Psalm, second half of verse 3.

[ 20 : 59 ] For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. The promise of eternal life is something that is at the heart of the Christian faith.

It's something most people today would associate with Christianity. But for so many people, I think eternal life is a concept that's very individualistic.

It's very much between me and God. It's very much about me and my Savior. But we are saved as a people. The Bible says that we are saved as a family of God.

We are brothers and sisters united together in the gospel. And that means that eternal life for us, this promise of future hope in the new heavens and the new earth, that yes, we'll be there with Jesus, we'll be there with our Savior, but we'll also be there together.

We'll be there in the new creation with one another. This promise of life comes in the context of unity. Now, the focal point in this verse for life is Mount Zion.

[ 22 : 05 ] It's Jerusalem. It's the city of God, the place in the Old Testament where God meets with his people. And people today make pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

They travel to Jerusalem for many different reasons. They go for refreshment. They go for a break. They go to find spiritual encouragement. My own grandfather drove from Scotland to Israel in a mini.

Probably wouldn't do that today. But people make all kinds of pilgrimages for all kinds of reasons. But my grandfather, when he finished his time in Israel, he probably had a blast. He came back.

The journey that we're on as Christians to the new Jerusalem, to the ultimate dwelling place of God with his people is, it's our final destination. It's our great hope.

And Sam 1-3 promises us that there, the new Jerusalem, the city of God on earth, God with his people is the promise of life forevermore. That's our great hope.

[ 23 : 05 ] Whatever bumps we might come across in the journey, whatever setbacks we might face, whatever hurdles might come our way, we have this wonderful, incredible hope, the promise of life with God and life with each other forevermore.

So just as we come to a close, in terms of applying this Sam, I think the key is that we have to really consciously value unity. I think unity is such a precious commodity.

We need to cherish it. We need to protect it. We need to guard our hearts against the things that disrupt it and the things that put it in danger. We need to watch out for gossip and jealousy and unkind words and all kinds of different things.

I think secondly, we also need to make a conscious effort to spend time in the church with those who are different, those who maybe are not like us.

I'm not saying that all the Scots here need to be supporting England on Wednesday, but we do need to make an effort with those who are maybe outside of our friend groups, outside the people we gravitate towards with our coffee.

[ 24 : 10 ] I think it's easy to fall into the trap of always speaking to the same people, but we are one body, we are united together, each one of us, if our faith is in Christ and we should reflect that.

Maybe it means getting more involved with your city group or something midweek, being part of your church family. Maybe it means taking more time to pray for your brothers and sisters.

I think thirdly, we really need to pray for our leaders, for those who have been called to be elders and deacons, for our minister Derek, for our women's pastoral teams, for all those who are involved in church leadership.

I think unity amongst leaders is one of the key areas that Satan will use. It's one of the key areas that will be used to attack the church, to bring division and all kinds of horrible things.

We've seen that in recent years in different congregations and it's tragic when unity is destroyed. So we need to pray, we need to be watching out, we need to be guarding our hearts.

[ 25 : 12 ] Unity is incredibly, incredibly precious. Behold, David says, how good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity.

I want to close this evening with the words of the Apostle Paul. He says this in Ephesians chapter 4. I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Take every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body, one spirit, just as you recall to one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is overall and through all and in all.

Let's pray. Lord God, gracious Father in heaven, we come before you this evening and we thank you for the gospel that unites people from every tribe, every tongue and every nation.

[ 26 : 14 ] Lord, we thank you that you've brought us together this evening from our different backgrounds, from different life stages, from different careers, people who are radically different in so many different ways.

And Lord, we thank you for the thing that unites us. We thank you for the power of the gospel to break down barriers. Lord, we do thank you Lord for the work of Jesus Christ.

And we pray Lord that you'd be at work in our hearts this evening to give us a real sense of how wonderful that unity is. Lord help us to appreciate anew how powerful and how wonderful and how pleasant and how good it is when we dwell together in unity.

So Father, we pray that you'd help us to better love one another, help us to better support one another in our burdens. And Father, we pray for our church's leadership.

We pray for our elders and our deacons and those involved in pastoral work. Father, we pray that you'd protect them. Lord that you would guard them. We pray for our minister, Derek.

[ 27 : 16 ] And Lord, we ask that you would protect the unity of St. Columbus. We pray too, Father, for the church worldwide. Lord, we ask for all those who are involved in church leadership.

Lord that you would protect them and watch over them. Father, forgive us this evening when we are inward looking and when we are self-centered. We pray Lord that you would equip us and enable us to be a people who point others to you through our unity and our love for one another.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.