

Blessing Psalm 134

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Well, good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, welcome. We're glad that you would join us, and I hope that as we come here, and if you are new to our community, to our congregation, that what you would experience is kindness and hospitality, welcome and grace. We hope that that's what you would experience, because that's what we are all in need of. Like, I need that. I need grace and kindness and love, and so do you. Whether this is your first Sunday or you've been coming since the inception of this church, that's what we are in need of, and why the one we're in need of this from is the Lord himself, and that's why we gather each and every Sunday, to be remembered, to be reminded of his grace, to be met by his love and his hospitality, and so if you are a guest or visitor, we hope that that's what you would know more of this morning, and that we all would know more of that, so welcome.

This morning we are continuing in our sermon series in the book of Psalms. We're in Psalm 134 this morning, so we're going through the Psalms during the summer. The summer's almost over, believe it or not, so we actually only have a few more weeks, but this morning we're in Psalm 134, and Psalm 134 is the last of the Songs of Ascent. That's what they're called. There's 15 of these Psalms that, in the title, are called Songs of Ascent, and these were the songs that were sung by the people of God as they were pilgrimaging on their way to Jerusalem for their various festivals and feasts. So, a friend of mine, a pastor friend, he refers to the Songs of Ascent as the pilgrim's playlist, okay? This is their road trip music.

So, as they're going on the way, as they're coming up to Jerusalem, as they're moving to the house of the Lord and ascending the Temple Mount, they would have sung these songs, and as they sang these songs, they're reminding one another of why they're going up to this place. They're preparing themselves for when they arrive, and they're shaping their expectations for what their worship would be like. That's what these Psalms are doing, and it does it not just for those who are pilgrimaging to Jerusalem, but it's shaping our expectations as well. So, let's read Psalm 134, a Song of Ascent.

“Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD! May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!” (ESV)

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word, and we ask now that you would help us. Help us so that we would see your goodness, your glory. Help us so that we would learn from your Word, and we would live as your people. Help me so that my words would honor you, and all of us, so that our hearts would be inclined towards you. So, we ask by your Spirit to work and move, and we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

So, when I was a young child, my father, for his job, had to travel for a short period of time. I was very young at the time, but, and I don't remember a lot of the details, but I do remember that because of what he did, he had to travel. He'd be away for days, sometimes even a week

or so. See, my father, he worked for a bank in Canada. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Canadian. So, he worked for a bank in Canada, a bank called CIBC, and my dad was part of the division of global securities. Now, global securities isn't what you think it is. It doesn't mean my dad was packing. Like, he wasn't carrying. It wasn't those kinds of securities. This was Canada, after all. But, so, it wasn't those sorts of securities. It was more like global markets, and how do the markets, like, stay secure, and how do they interact with one another, and those sorts of things, and honestly, I think that's what he did, because I really don't know. I asked him many times. He told me, and it, whatever, you know, I was like, okay, you're leaving. That's what I know, and so, he would. He would have to travel for his job. He would come down to New York City. Sometimes he'd go to France, to Austria, to the UK, and I don't remember what those weeks were like when he was gone. Really, I was pretty young.

I don't remember what it was like, just my mom, and my siblings, and when my dad wasn't there, but what I do remember is when he returned, because when he returned, we would greet him at the door. My mom would give him a kiss. My brother and I would give him a hug, and after all the pleasantries were over, I would start to look, and I would start to gaze, and I would start to focus my attention and wonder what did he bring for me this time. I was hoping that he'd have a little bag in his hand, and if it was in his hand, maybe it was tucked away in his suitcase, and he would be bringing me what I was hoping was that beautiful European chocolate, right? It's so much better than American chocolate. We can just admit it. I know y'all might not like Europe, but it's way better. And that's what I was hoping for. I wanted some of that European chocolate, and so, that's all that I was thinking about. What did you get me? Did you bring me anything?

Now, this isn't unique to the Pennylegion household. It wasn't just Penny as a six-year-old kid wondering those things, because we've probably heard these things in our own families when mom or dad are gone away, and they come back, whether it's for business or vacation. Oftentimes, they're met with a child who asks, what did you bring me? What do I have? What did you get me? And we do this. It's not just children who do it. We do it. This fact that these are the questions that run through our minds, it points to something about us, that oftentimes, it's much more easy for us to be more interested in the thing a person brings than the person themselves. It's easy to reduce an experience to simply, what am I going to get out of it? What's in it for me? And we don't just do this with our parents when they go away on vacation or on a work trip.

Bless the Lord

I think sometimes we do this with the Lord. We do this with the Lord. So, let's do a little diagnostic test, okay? And let's see how we come out. So, when you came this morning for worship, why did you come? What was going through your mind? Maybe you're coming, and you were coming to worship this morning or last week or hopefully next week. You'll come back after this. But, you know, you were thinking, I really hope we sing the songs I like. Or at least the songs I can tolerate. And hopefully, next week, I'll sing the songs that we like. Give a little bit here, a little bit there. Or hopefully, you know, the sermon will make me feel good about myself and my place in this world. Or I'm coming because, you know, they have great programs for my kids and the exact kind of program I need for my kid. Or maybe it's because we have coffee and a fellowship hour. We can sip, you know, marginally decent, sometimes good cup of coffee and have great conversation. Maybe that's why we come.

Or did we come to exalt the Lord? Why are we here? Now, don't hear what I'm not saying. Those things - coffee, conversation - those things are beautiful. They're good. Singing songs that we enjoy? Hearing a message that spurs us along having things for our kids. Like, these things are good. They're right. There's nothing wrong with them. But they're not the focus of why we come to worship. You see, at the center of worship, it's really not about us or our preferences, but it's about the Lord. It's about Him. And that's what this psalm is pointing us to.

That's what this psalm is talking about. It is about the worship of God by God's people. I don't know if you noticed, but in these three verses, very short psalm, right? In these three verses, there are two repeated words. Did you see them? The first repeated word shows up five times. It's the word, the Lord. Five times in three verses, the Lord's name is invoked, is spoken of, is brought to our attention. And it's not just God, but it's His personal covenantal name. Because, like many of you already know this, but in case you don't, where it says Lord, it's spelled in all caps. And when this shows up in the psalms, it means it's a translation of God's covenantal name, Yahweh. So, in three verses, the psalmist is drawing our attention to the one that we worship. He's drawing our attention to the Lord. He is our focus. That's the first repeated word.

The second repeated word is a verb. And it shows up in each one of our verses one time, in each of our verses. And it's the word, to bless. Twice we're called to bless, and once we're called to be blessed. And so, when we consider the psalm in its context, I just said that it's the pilgrimage of the people to Jerusalem, as they're going up to the place of worship, as they're singing this last song of ascent, as they're wondering, why are we going up here again? What they hear is that we are going up to bless the Lord. We're going up to bless the Lord. We hear it in verse one. "Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord." Now, I wouldn't blame you if you just kind of passed over that word, bless, because if you've read through the psalms, you've seen it a lot. And so, it's easy for it to just kind of fade into the background, kind of become white noise to us a little bit. In the English Bibles, in the psalms, the word, bless, or blessed, or blessing, it appears 107 times in 97 different verses. And so, we're used to hearing it.

We're accustomed to hear blessing. But oftentimes, I imagine that we think about blessing as us being blessed. The Lord blessing you or me. And we're going to get to that. That's coming later. But before we receive blessing, what we're told is that we bless. We bless God. And in the psalms, when the object of our blessing is the Lord, it's speaking about worship and praise of God. In fact, this Hebrew word, when God is the object of it, has the connotation of a door with bended knees. So, it's that posture of worship. And so, what we see is that the heart of this psalm is an encouragement to worship God. And this worshiping of God is a corporate endeavor. We see that both those who lead the worshiping community, as well as those who are part of it, are called to bless God.

So, I say those who lead because look at verse 1. "Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord." So, in the context of the psalms and of the Old Testament, the servants of the Lord and those who stand by night are probably a reference to the Levitical singers or the professional worship leaders. So, the way that the Old Testament worshiping community was structured was we had the high priest. We remember the high priest from our time in Hebrews. The high priest would go into the holy place once a year on the Day of Atonement, and he would make sacrifice for the people and for himself. We have

the high priest. Then we have the Levitical priesthood, who were also priests who were going about doing sacrifices when people brought them and those sorts of things.

But then we also had people who were part of the kind of liturgical leadership of the church, who it was their job to help the congregation, to help the people to sing, and to be led into worship. And that's what this is probably a reference to. When it speaks of those who are standing by night, who are the servants of the Lord, it's probably referring to them. And we know in Deuteronomy and 1 Chronicles that these people who had this responsibility in the temple would do it all day and night, all night long. In the wee hours of the morning and in the middle of the night, they were always on duty. There was always worship and honoring of God. And these are the people who are being reminded here to bless the Lord. And it's not hard to imagine why they might need to be reminded. If they're at the back end of a 12-hour worship shift, it would be very easy for it to become rote and listless and maybe a little lazy. I mean, it's not hard to imagine because, I mean, let's just be honest, we're not staying up all night worshipping the Lord.

We come once a week. And sometimes our worship, my worship can feel listless and rote. And so, they're needing this reminder. We need this reminder. Bless the Lord. Worship Him. Now, of course, today, there's not someone in the sanctuary worshipping God all night long. Tomorrow morning, if you show up at 3 a.m., I'm not going to be here. Tobias isn't going to be here. Rebecca's not going to be singing. I don't think. Right? Yeah. Yeah. She's not coming. So, and in fact, you can come tomorrow morning at 3 a.m. and try to get in and do your own personal worship. I think you'll be met by the police, however.

So, this is where our worship community actually differs with the Old Testament people of God. And though we differ, the particular still remains. That whether we are worshipping God all day and night, or whether we are coming as a corporate body once a week, we are called to bless the Lord. And it's not just the pastors, and it's not just the singers, but we are all called to give Him the glory He's due. Remember the context. It's the people of God going up to Jerusalem to engage in worship. And it's the people who are coming to Him. And also, in verse 2, we have this phrase, "lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord." Now, this could be still a particular reference to the Levitical singers, to those leading in worship. But I actually think it's beyond that. It's broader than that. That it's now speaking to the entire worshipping community. Leaders and participants. And what we see that's interesting in verses 1 and 2 is that all the verbs are plural.

We worship. Not just me. Not just Tobias. Not just Rebecca or Dale. We. All of us. We worship. We do it together. It's corporal. It's communal. It's participatory. And it's physical. Did you see that? I already mentioned the connotation of kneeling. And a couple weeks ago, we talked about blessing being something that's verbal. We say it aloud. But it's very explicit in verse 2. "Lift up your hands." Now, if you've read through the Psalms, it becomes very interesting how frequently the Psalms talk about our physical posture in the context of worship. The Psalms say things like fall before the Lord. Lift your eyes to the heavens. Clap your hands and stretch them out. We are whole bodied worshipers. We don't simply worship in our minds and in our hearts, but we do it with our entire body. This is one of the reasons why in our church, if you're able to, we invite you to stand. Or to sit. Why we sing aloud. And don't just simply hum a tune in our minds. Why we bow our heads in prayer. And why we stretch forth our hands when we receive the benediction. Because we worship God in all of our body. In all of our physicality. With our hearts. And with our minds. And with our

hands. And with our tongues. And we do this together. Blessing the Lord with our entire being.

Blessed by the Lord

But the Psalm doesn't just tell us we, in our worship, that we not only bless the Lord. It also tells us that we are blessed by the Lord. So, verse 3 says, "may the Lord bless you from Zion. He who made heaven and earth." So, in verses 1 and 2, God is the object of our blessing. But now, he is the one doing the blessing. Now, bless here takes on a different meaning. Same word. Same Hebrew word. But in the context, it means something different. Because it can't mean that God worships us. Right? Because to worship us would be idolatry. And God is not an idolater. He won't give the worship that is due to him to us. So, it can't mean bend the knee. It can't mean worship.

Now, what this means, this word bless, is God extending favor and kindness and care. And this blessing he gives, it's personal. Did you notice in verses 1 and 2, I mentioned that the language is corporate. It's plural. But now in verse 3, it's the singular you. It's not y'all. It's singular. You. So, listen to what the psalmist is saying. The creator of heaven and earth blesses you. Not just us. But you. Let that sink in for a moment. That he is mindful of you. The one who made the stars and set them in their place. The one who caused the mountains to rise up out of the ground. The one who told the seas and the waters where to stop. He knows you. Intimately. Jesus in Matthew 10 says that the hairs of our head are all numbered. The Lord knows how many hairs you have and how many hairs you used to have, as the case may be. He knows which hairs are brown and red and which hairs are now gray. And which hairs used to be gray. That's how close, how intimate he knows you. He knows the hairs on your head and the thoughts in your mind and the desires of your heart. He knows you that well.

Y'all, that is remarkable. That is remarkable. That the maker of heaven and earth, that he's the one we're blessed by. You know, when we contemplate this, I think the words of David in Psalm 8 are appropriate. Because David, when he was considering this and thinking about the fact that God is mindful of him, he said this. He said, when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him? That's the right question, isn't it? Who are we that you would show us favor? That you would show me blessing? And the answer to that question, who are we? What is man? It's not found in our resume or our CVs. It's not us invoking our gifts, our abilities, our qualities. It's not us looking at God and going, who are we? Well, I'm me. And boy, you're lucky to have me on your team. That's not what we say.

That's not how we respond, no. No, you see, when we consider who God is and who we are, we realize that God doesn't bless us because we're worthy of blessing. No, we know that we have fallen short, that we've wanted his gifts more than we've wanted him, the giver, that we have turned from his ways and we have exalted ourselves. No, the truth is, is we are not worthy of his blessing and yet the amazing thing is he blesses us anyway. And he blesses us because he's full of blessing and full of compassion and full of care. He blesses us from Zion, the place where he dwells, where he can be found, and he blesses us with his son who is the fullness of God's blessing to his people. Because in Christ, we experience the fullness of his care and of his compassion and his blessing because in Jesus, the maker of heaven and earth, the one who set the stars in their place, he came down from heaven and dwelled upon his earth and he gave his life on the cross and he rose and ascended to the right hand of the

Father in heaven and from there, he showers you and me with blessing, with grace and forgiveness, with kindness and blessing. And friends, that is why we worship him. That is what we should expect when we come into this place.

We would sing to the creator of the heavens, that we would worship the one who has given his life, that we would bless the one who has blessed us. That's why we worship. That is why we bless him. Because before we could ever bless him, he has blessed us in his son. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you that you have showered us with blessing, that you have given us what we do not deserve, that you have given us your grace and mercy, your forgiveness and care. And so we bless you, our God and King. We worship you and praise you and ask that you would help us so that our worship, not just today, but every day with our lives, with our tongues, with our minds and our desires, every part of us would be given over in worship of you, our God and our King, who is due of our worship. And so we ask, meet with us now. Allow our prayers and our songs in the dining at your table to give you the worship that you deserve. And we pray all this in Christ's name and God's people said together, amen.