Introduction:

We live in a nation that is deeply divided. While we may be called the United States of America, it seems at times that unity is about the last thing that is true of us.

- We have division **politically** between Blue states and Red states, between Democrats and Republicans
- We have division **economically** between the rich and the poor.
- We have division **racially** between blacks and whites and other minorities.
- We have division in our **families** as we are told 50% of marriages end in divorce.
- We have division in our **churches** as church splits sadly happen over things as serious as doctrine and as trivial as carpet colors.

In light of all of this division around us, when we read Psalm 133, our text for this morning, we can easily agree with David that finding brothers who live together in unity is a good and pleasant discovery.

Please turn your Bibles open to Psalm 133 and let’s examine together what God would have to say to us about unity and fellowship through this short Psalm. I’ll be reading from the ESV. **“A song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is 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! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”**

Whether between Jewish believers of David’s day or between Christian believers today, unity is a good and pleasant thing. As we consider Psalm 133 this morning, there is one clear idea that I believe we as believers this side of the cross need to see from it, and it is just this:

**Main Idea: Christian unity is both a gift and a goal**

As we work through this text this morning, we’re going to see that having unity between believers is a wonderful gift that we receive, but it is also a goal that Christians need to work towards. We’re going to unpack this idea is by answering three questions regarding this good and pleasant gift called Christian unity:

1. **What is necessary to have Christian Unity?**
2. **Who gives us Christian Unity?**
3. **Why should we want Christian Unity?**

So let’s begin with the first question we need to answer is…
1. What is necessary to have Christian Unity?

If we could compare Christian unity to making a cake, then we need to know what the necessary ingredients are. There are five key ingredients that we need to have in order to have Christian unity. The first is that we need to have...

A. A Common Father

Look again at v. 1 with me. “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” Psalm 133 is one of the 15 “Psalms of Ascents”. These were songs sung by Jewish pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem to worship God during the yearly Feasts. These Jewish pilgrims shared a common physical ancestry – they were all physical descendants of Abraham. Thus, through their common connection to Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, they were considered brothers.

As Christians we have become brothers and sisters not because we're all related to Abraham, but because we have God himself as our Father through faith in Christ. Throughout the New Testament, Christians are referred to as “brothers” because we have been adopted into God’s family through faith. So this Psalm is talking about those who are brothers in the Lord. This is the first element we need for Christian unity. We need to have a common Heavenly Father.

The second ingredient we need is for Christian unity is we need to have...

B. A Common Community

Look at what these brothers do together: it says they “dwell in unity” or if you're using a different translation it might read “live together” or “dwell together.” For the Feasts in Jerusalem, Jews would come from all over to take part in the week-long celebration. If you were to enter into Jerusalem during one of these weeks, you would find the inns, streets and marketplaces filled with various Jewish believers from all over the world. During that week these Jews would dwell together in Jerusalem - eating, sleeping, praying, and worshipping together as a community of believers.

Of course we don’t make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to attend week-long feasts anymore, but we still “dwell” together as part of a common community. We do this in a couple of ways, the first one being rather obvious. First, we dwell together physically as we gather together every Sunday to worship God as a community of faith. Furthermore, we physically come together in our discipleship classes, small groups, corporate prayer times, and other events. It’s different than what God’s covenant people did in the OT, but we still gather together in various venues to worship God and connect with other believers for mutual encouragement and fellowship.

Yet there’s another way we dwell together as Christians that may be much less obvious but is no less true. Besides dwelling together physically as we are doing right now, we also dwell together spiritually. Scripture tells us we dwell together spiritually “in Christ”. When we put our faith in Christ, we became part of the Body of Christ and therefore we are “in Christ.” What that means is that Christ – his persons and his work – becomes
the central focus of what unites us a Christians. We are united together because we have been brought together in Jesus Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – a German Lutheran pastor who was martyred under the Nazis – wrote powerfully about the centrality of Christ in Christian community in his book, *Life Together*. He wrote, “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this.” In other words, Christian community exists only because of Jesus and what He has done for each of us. We aren’t united by our race, our nationality, our socio-economic status, our political affiliation, our age, our musical preferences – none of those things bind us together.

Bonhoeffer continues, “What determines our brotherhood is what that man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us…. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us.” Ultimately, what binds us together is our common salvation and hope in Jesus Christ. Because we are spiritual “in Christ” our unity must come from Christ and not any of those secondary things the rest of the world units behind.

I remember one of the first small groups I led while I was in Chicago. One weekend our whole group decided to take a little weekend get-away together and visit Springfield, the state capital, and take in some of the Abraham Lincoln exhibits. While we were there, one of the workers stopped to talk to us and commented, “You guys must be from Chicago” which was a curious thing to say since none of us were wearing anything with logos that would give him such an impression. We couldn’t figure out what prompted him to say that until later over supper: it was because of the make-up of our group. Our small group consisted of an African-American, two Asians, a Filipino, and a few Caucasians. I guess in Springfield you didn’t find a many groups of people traveling together who were as ethnically diverse as we were. But for us, that was normal; we didn’t think anything of it because we were untied by Christ, not by our ethnic identities.

Consider what Paul writes in Galatians 3, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.” Paul says that Christ abolished the distinctions that used to divide us. All these other things – race, gender, wealth, and so on - should no more be the cause for division among us than they should be the ground that brings us together! Christ and Christ alone is the basis of our fellowship.

So for Christian unity, we first need a Common Father and second we need a Common Community. The third ingredient we need is…

C. A Common Creed

Jewish believers who would come to the Feasts shared a common set of beliefs about God and his Law. For example, each Jew would affirm their belief in Yahweh as the one true God by daily reciting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.”
As Christians we share a common creed, a common set of beliefs about God. These core convictions about who God is and what he has done for us help define us as a community and unite us together. Here at Grace Brethren Church we have a doctrinal statement in our church constitution stating what we as a church believe about God, Jesus, the Church, and so on. These commonly shared beliefs are part of what binds us together as believers.

Moving on, the fourth ingredient we need for Christian unity is…

**D. A Common Purpose**

Each of the Jewish pilgrims had a common purpose: to travel to the Temple to worship God. The Jews were unified in their shared desire to give God the glory and worship that he deserves. We have the same common purpose as Christians – to give glory to God. This is summed up in first question of the Westminster Larger Catechism: “What is the chief and highest end of man?” The answer is, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.”

Here at Grace Brethren Church we have the glory of God also as our main purpose. Our common purpose that unites us is this: **Grace Brethren Church exists to glorify God through worship, discipleship, service, and mission.** Since each one of these four means by which we seek to glorify God are well-attested in Scripture, this purpose is a clear and biblical one we can all rally around.

Yet while we should be unified around this common purpose, we can differ as to how these goals are accomplished. In other words, Christian unity allows us to disagree about the means, but not the ends. For example, I think it’s safe to say we can all agree that we need to give to God the praise and worship that He deserves. But how we do that, the kind of songs should we sing, the musical styles we use, we sometimes disagree on. Or let’s take evangelism: We can all agree that evangelism and global missions is an important aspect of our call as Christians. But how we best accomplish this purpose – passing out tracts, friendship evangelism, short-term mission trips – is not something we always agree on.

It’s okay for us to disagree on the means as long we are unified in the ultimate ends we hope to achieve. Once we lose sight of that, once we make the means more important than the goal, then we run the danger of becoming divided, which leads us very nicely into the fifth element we need for Christian unity…

**E. A Common Love**

If you are going to have unity between Christians, if there is going to be true, deep, rich fellowship in the church, then you must have love. Love is the glue that binds all the rest of the elements together. If I can paraphrase what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 about the need for love amid gifts of speaking in the tongues of angels, fathoming all mysteries, and giving all of one’s possessions to the poor, I’d summarize it like this: If you ain’t got love, you ain’t got nothin’! This is the “goal” part of Christian unity. It’s
something that we have to strive for. Sure sometimes it’s easy, when everything is
going our way and people are in agreement with us, then it’s easy to love our brothers.
But it gets significantly more difficult when for some reason other people just can’t
seem to see that my view is the right one.

Having a common love means you’re willing to put the needs of others ahead of
yourself. It means sometimes things in the church don’t go your way and rather than
leaving the church in a huff, you stay and commit yourself to those people. You love
them even when they don’t follow your agenda. That’s the kind of love we need for
Christian unity – real love that puts others ahead of ourselves, that doesn’t have a “my
way or the highway” attitude but one like Jesus that comes and humbly serves others.

So we’ve answered our first question, “What do we need to have Christian Unity?” We
need to have a common Father, a common Community, a common Creed, a common
Purpose, and a common Love. Now we need to move to our second question…

2. Who gives us Christian Unity?

After what we’ve just talked about, this is isn’t a very difficult question for us to answer:
We receive Christian unity from the Lord! It is God who blesses us from heaven with
the gift of brothers living together in unity. God is the only one who can take people
from such different backgrounds and cultures and experiences and make them into a
unified people. Christian unity is a gift from God!

Look back in your Bibles at what David has to say about it by looking at v. 2-3. “It is
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!”

As David reflects upon the goodness of brothers living together in unity, he uses two
similes to describe what it is like: it is like oil and like dew. These are similes that
speak to a couple of aspects of this wonderful gift of God called unity. First…

A. It is an abundant gift from God

The first simile speaks about precious oil being poured on Aaron’s head, and running
down on his beard and upon his clothes. Aaron was a high priest; the anointing oil was
used to consecrate Aaron and other priests for service. The ingredients that make up
this anointing oil are described in Exodus 30 and nearly all the ingredients were rare
and as a result very expensive. Thus for this oil to be poured out to such an extent that
it ran down to Aaron’s beard and even down to his robes suggests an abundant use of
this anointing oil.

Now oil is often used in the Old Testament as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so we may
have an image here of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon God’s chosen people. In
light of that, think about how the Holy Spirit poured out on believers at Pentecost in
Acts 2. Over 3,000 people became believers that day because of the outpouring of the
Holy Spirit. Then what is the very next thing Luke describes after that? He describes Christian unity. In Acts 2:42-47 he says this:

   And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2 is a picture of the five ingredients of Christian unity we talked about before: they had a common Father (in God), a common community (by attending the temple and meeting in each others’ homes), a common creed (devoted to the apostle’s teaching), a common purpose (breaking of bread, prayer, worship) and a common love (giving of their possession to anyone who had need). The abundance of the Holy Spirit poured out on Pentecost led directly to a Christian community that dwelt together in unity.

But besides being an abundant gift from God, the second simile tells us it is also…

B. It is a refreshing gift from God!

At the beginning of v. 3 David writes, “It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion!” Mount Hermon is Israel’s highest peak, located about 200 miles away from Jerusalem. It was well known for its abundant dew that resulted in rich plant life. Mount Zion, on the other hand, was very arid and dry by comparison. For Mount Zion to get the dew that fell on Mount Hermon would be refreshing. It would be a good and pleasant gift from God, just like brothers living together in unity.

In more contemporary terms, imagine being out in the desert, walking for miles upon miles under the blazing heat of the sun. As you climb over a sand dune and see a huge swimming pool full of cool, clear water just a few yards ahead of you. What do you do? You run towards that pool and jump right in! Ahhh… refreshing! That’s what David is trying to say unity between believers is like. When you’ve been scorched all week by the divisions and separation in your relationships, and your community, and your nation, coming to church on Sunday should be like diving into that swimming pool. You walk in through those doors and say “Ahhhh!”

So we’ve answered two questions, “What is necessary to have Christian unity?” and “Who gives us Christian unity?” Now we need to move to our third and final question…

3. Why should we want Christian Unity?

To answer that question, look with me at the end of v. 3. “For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore”
Why should we want Christian unity? Because that is the place where God’s blessing can be found, both in our lives now as well as in heaven. When we seek to live in love as brothers and sisters in the Lord, holding to a common creed, seeking to obey the great commandment and great commission our Lord has given us, and make Jesus the center of our lives, we will find the blessing of God poured out on us. You want God’s blessing, don’t you? Then actively seek to be untied with fellow Christians in the church, focusing on our common life in Christ. To avoid the church is to avoid the blessing of God; to be in the church is to be in the place where blessing is found because it is in and through the church where true unity is to be found.

And let’s not forget that ultimately God’s gift of Christian unity is a part of our eternal reward. David writes in v.3, “For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.” One of the great blessings of heaven is for us to finally be free of the sin that so often divides us and at last live in perfect harmony with each other. We’re given a glimpse of this in the book of Revelation as a multitude from every tongue, tribe, and nation stands before God’s throne in worship. What we enjoy as Christian fellowship in the present is but a small foretaste of what heaven will be like. Part of our anticipation for heaven should come from knowing that things like race, nationality, or wealth will not divide us any longer. Part of the blessing of heaven is that we will spend all eternity in perfect unity with each other before God.

So look around you. Grace Brethren Church is but a foretaste of our eternal reward in Christ. When we who are of different ages, race, gender, backgrounds, interests, and personalities gather together to worship Christ, we are experiencing part of our eternal reward! We demonstrate right now the unifying work of God in our hearts because we are gathered together and unified one to another because of Christ. The blessing of Christian unity begins with how God is reconciling us together today, and it is a first fruit of the blessing of complete unity we will experience in heaven for all eternity.

Conclusion

So let me wrap this up briefly by saying that in a world so divided and fractured, we can agree with David that Christian unity is most certainly a good and pleasant gift. It is a gift we’ve received by grace because of Christ, but it is also a goal that every Christian needs to strive for. I encourage all of you this morning to enjoy this good and pleasant gift from God and strive to make true of our church more and more in what you do, by not focusing on those things that divide us but rather delighting in what unites us: a common Father, a common Community, a common Creed, a common Purpose, and a common Love in Jesus Christ. When we do so, we will experience more of God’s blessing in our fellowship, both now and forevermore.