

August 25, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Blessings

Psalm 134

1. Bless the LORD (verses 1-2).
2. May the LORD Bless You (verse 3).

A few months ago at Rock Valley Bible Church, we began a look at the Songs of Ascents. These are the Psalms beginning in Psalm 120 and ending in Psalm 134. They are the songs that Israel sang as they made their pilgrimage up to Jerusalem to worship the LORD.

In Deuteronomy 16:16, the LORD made it clear: "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread (i.e. Passover) and at the Feast of Weeks (i.e. Pentecost) and at the Feast of Booths."

And during these travels up to Jerusalem, the Songs of Ascents were their hymnals. They sang these songs to prepare their hearts for the worship of the LORD in Jerusalem.

We come this morning to the last of the Songs of Ascents: Psalm 134. Now, we haven't looked at all of these Psalms in order. We began with Psalm 122, which really sets the stage for all of the other Songs of Ascents. It speaks about traveling to Jerusalem, to the house of the LORD.

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.' Our feet are standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem." (Psalm 122:1-2). It speaks about how travelling there to worship was under divine decree. "To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the LORD -- An ordinance for Israel -- To give thanks to the name of the LORD." (Psalm 122:4).

This decree is found in Deuteronomy 16:16, the very reason for all of the Songs of Ascents. After Psalm 122, we took up the Psalms as fit the occasion. On Mother's Day, we looked at Psalm 127, a Psalm especially appropriate for mothers. On Father's Day, we looked at Psalm 128, a Psalm especially appropriate for fathers. On Memorial Day, we looked at Psalm 124, a Psalm that speaks of the military victories of Israel. On some occasions, we tried to group the Psalms together according to theme. Both Psalm 121 and Psalm 125 speak of the mountains, so we looked at those two Psalms in consecutive weeks. Both Psalm 123 and Psalm 131 speak of humility, so we looked at those two Psalms in consecutive weeks as well.

This morning, as we finish up our series, it is appropriate that we end with Psalm 134. In many ways, this Psalm is the climax of all of the Songs of Ascents. It describes worship in the temple, which all of the other Psalms have been working toward. In fact, here is my purpose in preaching through the Songs of Ascents. I believe that they all help to prepare our hearts for worship.

We come here to Rock Valley Bible Church each Sunday to worship the LORD together. God's inspired hymnal to prepare the hearts of His people to worship Him come right here in the Songs of Ascents (Psalm 120-134). My hope and my prayer in working through these Psalms is that God has impressed upon our hearts the central themes that He wants us to dwell upon as we come here each Sunday to worship. My hope and prayer is that these Psalms have helped us to come each Sunday prepared to worship Him. In fact, we are going to have a great opportunity to apply these things in two weeks.

Two weeks from now (on September 8th), we are planning to have a special "praise and prayer" service. On that Sunday, we will sing a few more songs than normal. On that Sunday, we will have a few seasons of prayer. Some in private reflection. Some in smaller groups. Some with the entire congregation. We want to come to the LORD, desperate for Him. We want to Him to come to us, because we are desperate for His blessing. So, come in two weeks, prepared for worship, ready to participate in our worship service. And what better way for you to prepare your hearts for that Sunday than to refresh your minds on all that we have learned.

Well, as I have said, this morning we have come to Psalm 134. In many ways, this is the pinnacle of the Songs of Ascents. The Songs of Ascents begin in Psalm 120, in a dark place, far from God, and far from His people.

Psalm 120:5-7

Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech,
For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
Too long has my soul had its dwelling
With those who hate peace.
I am for peace, but when I speak,
They are for war.

In Psalm 121, Jerusalem and the mountains surrounding her is in sight.

Psalm 121:1-2

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains,
From where shall my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.

In Psalm 125, reference is made to these mountains, ...

Psalm 125:2
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the LORD surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.

But here in Psalm 134, we are in the temple. The Psalm calls us to worship the LORD. The Psalm seeks a blessing from the LORD. Let's read the Psalm this morning.

Psalm 134
Behold, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD,
Who serve by night in the house of the LORD!
Lift up your hands to the sanctuary
And bless the Lord.
May the LORD bless you from Zion,
He who made heaven and earth.

The key word in this Psalm occurs three times, one in each verse. It is the word, "bless." You can see it there at the beginning of verse 1, "Behold, bless the LORD." You can see it there at the end of verse 2, "And bless the LORD." You can see it there at the beginning of verse 3, "May the LORD bless you." Appropriately, I have entitled my message this morning, "Blessings."

In verses 1 and 2, it is we who bless the LORD. In verse 3, it is the LORD who blesses us. Let's look at my first point, ...

1. Bless the LORD (verses 1-2).

You can see the command right there in verse 1, "Behold, bless the LORD." The first word, "Behold," is a sort of call. Indeed, it's the same word that occurs in Psalm 133:1, ...

Psalm 133:1
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!

In Psalm 133, the word is a call to observation. Just look and examine how much a blessing unity is! But, in Psalm 134, the word, "behold" is a call to action -- "Behold! Get to it!" That's why the English Standard Version translates this word, "Come." "Come, bless the LORD" (verse 1, ESV). This was the call from this Psalm: "Bless the LORD."

Now, at this point, the question might well be asked, "What does it mean to 'bless' the LORD?" We normally don't think about "blessing" the LORD. We normally think about the LORD "blessing us." We normally think verse 3, "May the LORD bless you from Zion." We normally think of the superior blessing the inferior. We think of the politician blessing the baby. We think of the family patriarch blessing his children. But not the other way around.

Indeed, this is scriptural to think this way. Hebrews 7:7 says, "Without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater" (referring to Melchizedek's greatness, because Melchizedek blessed Abraham). But, here, we see the inferior blessing the superior. How are we to understand this?

I don't think that it's too difficult. To bless the LORD is to praise the LORD. That's why the New International Version translates this, "Praise the LORD" both in verse 1 and in verse 2. I think that this is a correct way of looking at things.

But, you need to know that the word in verses 1 and 2 is the same as the word in verse 3. Better than translating it differently is to understand it differently. Scripture often uses this word to mean, "to praise." We see this in Psalm 103, ...

Psalm 103:1-2
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me,
bless His holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget none of His benefits;

And in Psalm 104, ...

Psalm 104:1
Bless the Lord, O my soul! ...

(And the next phrases of Psalm 104:1 shows how it means, 'praise.')

Psalm 104:1
Bless the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord my God, you are very great!
You are clothed with splendor and majesty,

This word is often used with parallelism meaning, "praise." "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." (Psalm 34:1) "Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day." (Psalm 96:2). "Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name." (Psalm 100:4). [\[1\]](#)

There is a way that we (as inferiors) are able to bless God (our superior) when we praise Him. Notice here who is called to bless the LORD. We can see it right there in verse 1, "All servants of the LORD." We see further clarification in the last half of verse 1, "Who serve by night in the house of the LORD."

Literally, this is talking of those, "Who stand by night in the house of the LORD." We may ask: "Who are the servants of the LORD?" "Who are the ones who 'stand by night' in the house of the LORD?"

This isn't referring to the pilgrims who made the journey up to the house of the LORD. To be sure, they came into the house of the LORD. To be sure, they worshiped the LORD in the temple. But, they didn't serve in the temple. They didn't stand in the temple throughout the night. But, the Levites did. The "servants of the LORD" in verse 2 are the Levites. They were the servants in charge of the temple worship. They were the ones who took the night-watches in the temple.

We read in 1 Chronicles 23:30 of the Levites (verse 26) who are "to stand every morning to thank and to praise the LORD and likewise at evening [they are to stand and to praise the LORD]." The Levites were the ones who were "to keep charge of the tent of meeting" (1 Chr. 23:32); the ones who were to keep "charge of the holy place" (1 Chr. 23:32); the ones in charge of "the service of the house of the LORD" (1 Chr. 23:32). Part of their duties were "to offer all burn offerings to the LORD" (1 Chr. 23:31) whether on the weekly Sabbath services, or on the monthly new moon festivals, or on the annual festivals.

The Levites were in charge of these sacrifices. Every day, there was a morning sacrifice and an evening sacrifice.

There were also Levites who were singers. According to 1 Chronicles 9:33, they "lived in the chambers of the temple ... [and] engaged in their work day and night." So, this call of verse 1, to bless the LORD, was originally directed to the Levites. In Luke, we read of Anna the prophetess. She was an 84 year old widow, and "She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers" (Luke 2:37). These were the ones who were called to "lift up their hands to the sanctuary" (verse 2). They were the ones called, "to bless the LORD."

In some way, this is a reflection of difference in Old Testament worship and New Testament worship. In the Old Testament, worship was focused upon the priests and what they did in the temple. In the Old Testament, the focus was upon the sacrifice that you brought to the priest who would offer it on your behalf. But, our worship in the New Testament is different. We no longer need a human priest, because Jesus Christ is our priest. We no longer need an animal sacrifice, because Jesus Christ has become our perfect sacrifice.

New Testament worship is focused upon Jesus. Jesus died in our place that those who believe in Him will not perish, but will have everlasting life. And He is our mediator between God and man. He doesn't dwell in a temple in Jerusalem. Nor does He dwell anywhere here on earth. His dwelling place is at the right hand of the LORD in heaven (Psalm 110:1).

God doesn't call us today to bring sacrifices to Jerusalem When we approach the LORD in worship, we approach the Lord Jesus in heaven. By faith, we come to Christ. By faith, we worship the LORD. Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." And though the call here of verses 1 and 2 is directed toward the Levites, it comes straight to us by way of application.

That's why I put my first point by way of command. "Bless the LORD(verses 1-2)." This is the call to each and every one of us. We are all called to Bless the LORD (verses 1-2). We are all called to praise the LORD!

Now, certainly, there are many ways of praising the LORD. You can praise Him anytime. You can praise Him in the morning. You can praise Him in the afternoon. You can praise Him in the evening. You can praise Him with anyone. You can praise Him by yourself. You can praise Him with your spouse or a friend. You can praise Him with your family. You can praise Him in the congregation. You can praise Him anywhere. You can praise Him at home. You can praise Him in the car or on an airplane. You can praise Him at a soccer game. You can praise Him while checking out at a store.

Many things can draw us to worship -- Scripture, prayers, confession, songs, meditation. But, this morning, I want to focus our application upon our corporate gatherings. If there is any point of application of Psalm 134, it is in the corporate assembly. It is the nation of Israel gathering together for corporate worship. And so, here I place my emphasis.

Let me simply give you some counsel in how to come to Rock Valley Bible Church to bless the LORD all to the glory of Christ. And coming to

church each Sunday morning is important. John Calvin said it well, "we should consider it the great end of our existence to be found numbered among the worshipers of God". [\[2\]](#) So, let me give some very practical help this morning, ...

a. Sunday morning worship begins on Saturday night.

If you plan on leaving for a trip early in the morning, there are quite a few preparations to be made in order for things to go smoothly. Bags need to be packed. Cars need to be filled with gas. You need to go to bed early.

When it comes to corporate worship, the same principle holds. Worship on Sunday morning takes some preparation. Don't get me wrong. You can come here on Sunday morning without any preparation. But, there are things you can do on Saturday evening that will spoil your Sunday morning.

If you are out too late, you are up too late, your children are up too late, you make no plans on what the morning will look like, you fill your mind with garbage on Saturday evening. These things will spoil your Sunday morning. So, I encourage all of you to think about your Saturday nights. Make plans so that Sunday mornings can be the best they can be. Sunday morning worship begins on Saturday night.

b. A calm Sunday morning will help to prepare your heart.

Sunday mornings can be a very hectic time of the week. Children can oversleep. You have a spill at breakfast. A toilet gets clogged. You have an argument. Your children get in a fight. Satan loves to distract God's people on Sunday mornings. So, I encourage you to plan a buffer for Sunday mornings.

Spend some time in the Word of God before church. Spend some time in prayer before church. Listen to some God-honoring music. Read Scripture in the car on the way to church. Come an hour early, and join us for prayer.

A core group of us gather together each Sunday morning in the family room to pray. We go over some Scripture together. We pray for our needs. We pray for the lost. We pray for our worship service. We work hard to keep it varied. It's a great way to prepare our hearts for worshipping the Lord.

c. A right heart is more important than any outward show.

God is after our hearts. The fact that we are here at Rock Valley Bible Church on Sunday morning doesn't count for a whole lot. God doesn't look to see who has come on Sunday mornings to worship. Rather, God looks at the hearts of those who are here.

"God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). There are several times in Scripture when everyone is doing the right thing, but the Lord blasts them, because their hearts are not right.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, ... This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. ... in vain do they worship Me" (Matthew 15:7-9). Because of the wickedness of Israel, the LORD said, "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. ... [Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps]" (Amos 5:21-23).

Our worship here this morning is not about you making a show. It's about your heart being right with God, acknowledging your sin, trusting in your Savior, boasting only in the cross.

Now, this Psalm speaks about "lifting up hands to the sanctuary" (verse 2). Let me say this, it is OK to lift up your hands in worship at Rock Valley Bible Church. It's Biblical. It's an expression of praise to God. If you want to raise your hands, go ahead and be uninhibited.

But, know this, when you raise your hands, you will draw attention to yourself. I've been in assemblies where there are many people who are raising their hands in worship. Their hands come into my view. I can't help, but to look at those who are worshipping the LORD. And that may be a good thing. I may be encouraged by their zeal to worship the Lord. But it may also be a bad thing.

There is a danger that such raising of your hands can be a show. "Look at how spiritual I am! I'm really engaging the LORD in worship. I'm more into this than others are." [\[3\]](#)

4. Sunday morning isn't merely you and God.

By that, I mean that Sunday mornings are far more than your own individual time with the LORD. That comes at other times. Your morning devotions are you and God. But, Sunday mornings is you with the people of God.

Just look around. Everyone here is important in your worship. When Israel would travel to Jerusalem, they would travel in large caravans (for safety reasons), sometimes for days at a time (because they only came three times a year).

Do you remember Luke, chapter 2, when Jesus and His parents went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover? There were so many people making the journey together that they went a day's journey on their way home before they realized that He was missing! (Luke 2:44). And in Psalm 122, you get can feel the sense of comradery. In verse 4, all the tribes are going to Israel to give thanks to the LORD. Everyone is going to be there! And in verse 8, my brothers and my friends are there! So likewise with the church. We are here on Sunday mornings for each other.

You are here to encourage others. You are here to receive help from others. You are here to find out ways to serve one another. You are here to help others see Jesus.

Now, there are many who come to church and make it simply them and God. They come shortly before worship begins. They do their thing. They sing their songs. They pray their prayers. They hear a message. They leave shortly after worship ends, talking with nobody because they have done their worship thing.

If I am describing you this morning, please know that you are missing out. Sunday mornings is the time in the week that we can worship the LORD together. That's why we seek to extend our fellowship time after church. Should you stay around after our worship service for an hour, you would find many of us still around, talking and encouraging one another. That's why we seek to have fellowship dinners on the first Sunday of every month. So, come prepared to stay a few moments after service, if at all possible.

Well, there is some practical application for you regarding corporate worship. Follow these things and then you will indeed, Bless the LORD (verses 1-2).

Let's turn to my second point:

2. May the LORD Bless You (verse 3).

This comes straight from verse 3.

Psalm 134:3
May the LORD bless you from Zion,
He who made heaven and earth.

Again, before we come to "us", let's think about the original pilgrims. They were traveling up to Jerusalem. They were seeking to worship the LORD at the temple. And in verses 1 and 2, they call the Levites to bless the LORD. And here in verse 3, we see the blessing, "May the LORD bless you from Zion."

Many commentators believe that this is the response of the priests to the people. It sounds a bit like the benediction that the LORD gave the priests to invoke over the people:

Numbers 6:24-26
The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.

In this way, Psalm 134 becomes a sort of liturgy. The priests would say to the people, "Bless the LORD." The people would respond to them, "May the LORD bless you." Now, we have no idea if this is how the Psalm was actually used or not in this way. It seems as if this is how the Psalm reads. But, one thing we do know, verse 3 is a prayer for God's blessing.

Regardless of how it was originally used, the application can easily come straight to us. May the LORD Bless You (verse 3).

I have heard many people talk rightly about how worship isn't about us. When we worship the LORD, it should be about Him. Our giving is for God and His glory. Our singing is for God and His glory. Our preaching is for God and His glory. John MacArthur puts it like this, "If you go to church selfishly to seek a blessing, you have missed the point of worship. We go to give glory, not to get blessed. ... The issue isn't, Did I get anything out of it? But, Did I from my heart give glory to God?"

There is a ton of truth to this. God is the master; we are His servants. We serve Him; He doesn't serve us. God owes us nothing. God is not some cosmic blessing dispenser that we use to further our agenda.

Sadly, there are many who have fallen down that path. They seek God only because God will give them health or wealth or prosperity. God takes no delight in such people who used God to accomplish their own plans. On the contrary, God takes delight in those who are completely surrendered to Him and His will.

And so, when we worship, we aim for God's glory. This is all true. And to that, I say, "Amen." But, it's not quite so cut and dry as this.

Worship isn't a one-way street. There is much that we receive back from the LORD as we worship Him. With good intentions, many miss the other side. It's totally about God!

MacArthur also says, "blessing comes from God in response to worship." As we give ourselves completely to the LORD, we should look for something in return. Look here at verse 3, ...

Psalm 134:3
May the LORD bless you from Zion,
He who made heaven and earth.

If words have meaning, these words here express a desire to be blessed of the LORD. These words here express something that we will receive back from the LORD as we worship Him.

Psalm 42:1-2
As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
My soul thirst for God, for the living God.

Do you understand the imagery? We have a thirsty animal seeking satisfaction in the waters of a stream. And the deer gets to the water and licks it all up to satisfy his needs. That's a picture of worship. We come desperate for God. We need Him. We need His blessing.

I love how John Piper once put it. He said, ...

I say to my people: "You don't have anything to bring to this service. You come in here dead. You come in here discouraged. You come in here bankrupt. You come in here empty. And maybe if you are empty enough, God might get some glory from you by your craving His fullness.

If you come here craving, longing, desiring, knowing this one thing: everything in this world has failed to satisfy my soul, I'm going to church this morning because I just might drink from the fountain of living water and have my soul satisfied. That's the kind of people I want to come. And that's the kind of service that will explode with life. It's thirsty people, it's hungry people, it's needy people who come to worship. ^[4]

That's what we see here in Psalm 134. We see a blessing that God gives. And this is the heart behind our praise and prayer service that we will have on September 8th. I want to encourage you to come, desperate for God. I want you to come longing for God. I want you to say with Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth." (Psalm 73:25).

I want you to come with Paul's perspective, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:8). I want you to come with the heart of David, "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You." (Psalm 63:1).

If we are ever to expect a blessing from the LORD upon the life of our church, this is how we must come. We must come in desperation, longing for God, and longing for His blessing in our lives. Is that your heart toward the LORD? Do you long for His blessing in your life? Are you praying earnestly for the LORD to bless this church?

The LORD is fully capable of blessing our lives. He is the one "who made heaven and earth." Nothing is too difficult for Him. So let us seek Him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 25, 2013 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] See also Psalm 26:12; 63:4; 89:52; 115:18; 124:6; 135:19-20 (4 times); 145:10

[2] Calvin, Commentary on Psalm 52:8

[3] For more on worship, see this article by John MacArthur: <http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/a140>

[4] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbCL7ytY8yE>