

PSALM 134 PRAISE

This song is the last on our journey and is a fitting conclusion. The gathered pilgrims, having praised harmony now praise God for the last time together and are sent on their way with what they came to receive; God's blessing.

It is evening and tomorrow the pilgrims must go home and back to what they left (see Psalm 120). Perhaps one of the priests on duty now says the final blessing with them. What will they take away?

Blessing God 1-2

That is God who in all things must be blessed. The word for blessing has as its central meaning to pay homage to a superior or to kneel (95.6). To receive blessing is to kneel and receive the gifts that your Lord has to offer.

It is in the attitude of service that one receives blessing. It is in the attitude accepting the rule of God over us and for us that we receive the gifts of blessing.

The whole experience of pilgrimage and worship has been to prepare our hearts to live in a hostile world under the blessing of the sovereign God who graces us with his presence. The gifts of blessing will be ours as we kneel in blessing to God. No wonder we lift our hands in praise and prayer, for the gesture could mean both. Blessing can only lead to praise and thanksgiving.

We could stop there but remarkably the Psalm does not.

The blessing of God 3

God blesses us. God mutually blesses us. God offers us God's bended knee. The maker of heaven and earth joins his people not simply as sovereign but as one who blesses, who bends the knee.

We will need to explore some of the implications of the mutuality of the blessing between God and God's people, a mutuality that bespeaks the genuine relatedness between God and the pilgrims, based ultimately on God's redeeming love (PS 130.7-8).

Further reflections

To bless God is to praise the one in whom alone there is life; the power to create and sustain human life. We have seen from these psalms that blessing is the Lord at work in family life, in national life, in personal life creating and sustaining life even in a world that despises peace. The blessing of the Lord is at work in human work. All of these are brought to life supporting and life fulfilling completeness and rightness.

It is only to be expected that we will kneel before this God; that is, bless God.

What is striking is the mutuality of blessing that is anticipated in v3. God will voluntarily take on the servant role that belongs to the people. This mutuality, which means God's willingness to be vulnerable, results from God's risky choice of Zion (132.13-14) and God's choice that takes on responsibility for the people (132.15-18).

This blessing of God, this risky choice, means suffering for God. Over the history of God's blessing it has cost God in steadfast love and faithfulness, in forgiveness and mercy. God's blessing comes to persistently sinful people. God will bless them from Zion. Such blessing is our only hope. That hope for Christians is portrayed signed and sealed in the incarnation of God in the form of a servant (Phil 2.5-11).

Question

The pilgrimage is at an end. The people must return home. What will they take with them? What difference has been made to their lives? Was it a waste?