PP <u>Onward and Upward</u>

Part 15: Psalm 134-*The LORD Who is Worthy of Our Blessing* **9/27-28/2025**

Most believe that Psalms 120-134 were sung by Jewish pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for the High Holy Days: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Tabernacles and Pentecost
In **Psalm 134**, it seems the festival is over and they sang this song as they prepared to go home
Picture it as the finale of a Broadway musical, like the hugs and goodbyes shared at a family gathering as you stand at the door to get in the car
The pilgrims have full hearts of deep yearning and Psalm 134 captures it

PP 1-<u>Church, bless the LORD!</u>

One final time, like visiting your favorite restaurant again before you end your vacation, the pilgrims go to the temple to worship the LORD and they go during the evening where the Levites and priests were still serving
PP *"Now these, the singers, the heads of fathers' houses of the Levites, were in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night."*
1 Chronicles 9:33
There were gatekeepers, custodians, bakers for the morning bread of sacrifice, singers, all serving even into the evening while the temple court was brightly lit
The smell of incense fills the air and the sounds of singing and praying are everywhere
The pilgrim worshipers began the song, singing to the priests, **PP *"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!"* Psalm 134:1-2**
The priests would then respond in verse 3, for this is what is called an antiphonal song, sung by two alternating groups, but the song is begun by the worshipers encouraging the priests!

These pilgrim worshipers are exhorting the ***'servants of the LORD'*** those who oversee the worship, Levites and priests, to ***bless the LORD'***
But we need to bring this into the New Testament, for every Christian is made a priest: **PP *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession…"* 1 Peter 2:9**
So **Psalm 134** is an exhortation to us, that we would lift up holy hands and bless the LORD
We can only lift up holy hands because Christ first stretched out His hands on the cross for us
His sacrifice makes us clean, His righteousness covers us, and His Spirit now moves our hearts to worship, we bless the LORD because we have already been blessed in Him
Because of that truth, notice the very first word of the psalm, ***'Come'***, a call to worship!
It's a word that indicates sudden emotion or strong passion and even here we see a grand truth
It is an unimaginably terrible thing to come into the presence of God with an emotion-less, passion-less heart that has little affection for Him
The pilgrims were about to leave and go home, and they were overcome with a desire to bless the LORD so they called the priests to keep on blessing Him, to never stop!
They had gone to the temple to worship, to praise God, hungering to be in His presence
Oh they wanted the blessing of the LORD, verse 3, but even more, they wanted to bless Him
Increasingly today, the assumption is that worship is primarily *for* us, fostering entertainment focused services which allow for people to stand as spectators in the pews followed by topical sermons that meet our felt needs making sure we feel good when we leave

We evaluate church by how much it moves us, but we should wonder how much our worship moves God

Here the pilgrim worshipers exhort the priests to ***'lift up their hands to the holy place'*** **134:2**
Lifting up hands in worship was almost always connected to praise and prayer
PP ***"I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling"*** **1 Timothy 2:8**
To lift your hands to God is to implore Him, to surrender to Him as Lord and provider
Lifted hands represent a heart lifted up to God, **PP** ***"Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven"*** **Lamentations 3:41**
Our hearts will follow the posture of our bodies, so at home, at church, lift your hands to Him, fall on your face before Him, and your heart will be led into deeper intimacy with Him
But stop and remember: *God wants holy hands, clean hands to be lifted to Him*
PP ***"Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully"*** **Psalm 24:3-4**

Imagine you are at Garlicfest, and a vendor holds out to you a sample of food but to your horror, his gloveless hands are filthy and stained
Have you examined your hands, the condition of your heart before you came to Church today?
Have you looked back at your week, and reflected on your actions, your words, your thoughts, your purity, your affection for God?
Is there anything in your heart that should not be there, that needs to be confessed?
We have to walk through a metal detector before entering a government building, so did you put yourself through a spiritual detector before you came into this sanctuary and did it beep?
If it did, that is God saying he rejects your dirty hands and impure heart, that He doesn't want your worship until you confess the moral filth and turn to Him in repentance
How did you treat your spouse this week, your children, your parents, your friends, your enemies, your coworkers, your professors, other drivers, your neighbors?
That beep is conviction, the voice of the Holy Spirit, telling you that the sin in your life is robbing you of blessings, robbing you of life, which the LORD wants you to have
Christian, you are made righteous by the blood of Christ the moment you surrendered to Him in faith, but we walk through this world and often get muddied by sin, and God wants our hands and feet clean before we come into His presence
PP ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** **1 John 1:9**
Christian, we are to encourage one another to lift up clean hands to the LORD in praise and prayer, but where the Psalm now takes us will reveal the power of blessing

PP 2-<u>LORD, bless Your Church!</u>
PP ***"May the LORD bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth!"*** **Psalm 134:3**
For the third time, once each verse, we see this word ***'Bless'***, but what does it mean?
In 1982 I saw at the theater Star Trek, the Wrath of Kahn, and near the end, Spock died from radiation poisoning in saving the Enterprise and its crew from an explosion
In his final moment, with Captain Kirk on the other side of the protective barrier, Spock put his hand on the glass in his Vulcan Salute and said, *'Live long and prosper'*

Spock, played by Leonard Nimoy, was Jewish and took that from Hebrew priests
The priests of Israel, were allowed to convey the blessings of God upon the people and the practice continues today in orthodox synagogues
The priest will take off his shoes then have his hands ritually washed, and with head and arms covered with a prayer shawl, privately recites, *'Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who makes us holy with the holiness of Aaron, and has commanded us to bless His people Israel with love'*
When he finishes, each priest will then raise their hands **PP Pic** (*Priestly Blessing)*, palms facing downward, with thumbs touching and fingers spread together forming the Hebrew letter *Shin*, which is the root of the word Shaddai, the name of Almighty God
They believed the gap the fingers formed were windows for the divine presence of the LORD to shine through as they blessed the people with a benediction, most often this one
PP *"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."*
Numbers 6:24–26
PP *'Bless'* (Hebrew *Barak*) fundamentally means to impart God's favor and goodness
PP To bless God is to give Him credit for the honor and glory He is due in the act of *praise*
The NIV has the word ***'praise'*** instead of ***'bless'*** in verses 1 and 2, as it is directed to God
PP When God blesses us He is giving a portion of His infinite fullness to us in the form of His gracious benefits
PP When we bless someone we pronounce and/or extend God's favor and blessing to the person
Sir Moses Montefiore, the Jewish philanthropist, had as the motto of his family, *Think and Thank* because in the old Anglo-Saxon language, thankfulness meant *'thinkfulness'*
Christian, you are made a priest in the household of God, the church, so you can think on all God has done and praise Him day and night, conveying God's blessings to His faithful
We do not speak divine favor and grace to those living in unrepentant sin but to God's faithful
Not only speak blessings, extend them in the form of an encouraging presence, help and gifts
When you take some of what God's given you and help someone in need, you are blessing them
Serving the poor is extending the blessings of God, as is ministering to those in prison
You convey blessing when you pray with the suffering, you convey God's blessings when you come alongside the weary, discouraged and downtrodden
In **Psalm 134**, the greatest desire in the pilgrim worshipers hearts was to praise God and receive from Him His blessings of favor and goodness
The pilgrims could not fathom living outside of God's blessings and went to the temple before they departed saying with Jacob who wrestled with Jesus, **PP *"I will not let You go unless you bless me."* Genesis 32:26**

Let me close with one more, brief but important point: **PP 3-<u>We have a Great High Priest</u>**
His name is Jesus and just as our risen Savior was to ascend to heaven, **PP *"He led* [the disciples] *out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them."* Lk 24:50**
He lives before the throne of God today, interceding for us as our High Priest, blessing His Father on our behalf, and conveying those blessings to us, His faithful followers
Which is why I close with this great benediction: **PP *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"* Ephesians 1:3**