

Psalm 123

Prayer for mercy
A Song of degrees.

Psalm 123: This psalm expresses first the trusting attitude of the psalmist (verses 1-2), then his petition offered from a distressing situation (verses 3-4).

See note on Psalm 120:1-7. The author and situation are unknown.

- I. Exalting God (123:1-2);
- II. Enlisting God's Mercy (123:3-4).

Verses 1-2: The writer looks expectantly to God as a servant or slave looks to the hand of their master or mistress.

The "hand" here is used as a metaphor for provision, slaves were fully dependent on their masters to meet their needs. The psalmist is in a position of humble expectation as he awaits God's provision of help.

Psalm 123:1 "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens."

"Mine eyes": The progression from Psalm 121:1. "Dwellest in the heavens" (compare Psalms 11:4; 103:19; 113:5).

Dwellest means continues to dwell. We saw in a previous lesson, the psalmist looking from the valley to the hills. Here we see him looking into heaven itself.

1 John 5:7 "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."

There is a throne in heaven, and we are told that the Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. We also know that the Christians have an advocate with the Father. Our help is in the heavens. You cannot depend on people to help you. They will let you down. Our help is in heaven at the throne of God. We are allowed to look into the heavens to the throne of God, because Jesus opened the way for us. Many a saint like Stephen actually saw the throne of God. Do not look to this earth for answers to problems, you will just get more problems. Look to heaven and the Lord.

Psalm 123:2 "Behold, as the eyes of servants [look] unto the hand of their masters, [and] as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes [wait] upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us."

"Servants ... masters": The psalmist reasons from the lesser to the greater (human to the divine; earthly to the heavenly). One's eyes should be on the Lord to mercifully meet one's needs.

Behold says stop for a moment and pay close attention to this. These servants, mentioned here, were watching for their master to direct them to the next job. The maiden looking at her mistress is the very same thing. We must also look at the signs and signals we get from the Lord. We are not to be caught up in the signs, but we are to use them to tell us what is about to happen. (Matthew chapter 24), gives us a list of things to watch for. We must keep our attention on the Lord at all times. It is a very dangerous thing to take your eyes off the Lord, and start looking around you at things of the earth.

Verses 3-4: "Contempt ... scorning": From unbelieving pagans, perhaps the Samaritans (compare Neh. 1:3; 2:19).

Psalm 123:3 "Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt."

Merit is not pleaded; for, though servants, they knew they were unprofitable ones. But mercy is asked; whether by the awakened sinner, under first convictions, or by the backsliding professor, for forgiveness of sins, under a sense of them. Or as under the correcting: and chastising hand of God for them. And which is repeated, to show the state of their case, which requires mercy, and in haste. And the eagerness of their spirit, and the earnestness of their suit, their prayer being the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man.

"For we are exceedingly filled with contempt": By reason of meanness in outward circumstances, the common lot of God's people. And therefore are reckoned the faith of the world, and the off scouring of all things. And on account of their religion, which wicked men make a jest of; reckon an engine of state, to keep people in awe of the civil magistrate. Or a piece of priest-craft, to serve the lucrative views of a set of men. And particularly on account of peculiar doctrines embraced, which are branded as novel, irrational, and licentious. And ordinances, which entirely depend on the sovereign will of the institutor of them. For these things, and the like, contempt was plentifully poured upon them. They had enough of it, and too much, so much that they could not bear it. It was become intolerable and loathsome, and the more, as it had been a long time continued on them. So Aben Ezra and Kimchi interpret the word, rendered "exceedingly", of a long time.

We have discussed several times how urgently we need the mercy of our Lord. We do not want justice, because of our shortcomings. The fact that he asked twice for mercy just shows the seriousness of the request. Contempt, in this particular instance, means disrespect. It could also mean bitterness. The contempt they were filled with was from those around them. The evil people around the psalmist had no respect for him at all. They were bitter and hateful in their dealings with him.

Psalm 123:4 "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, [and] with the contempt of the proud."

That are in easy and affluent circumstances; abound in the things of this world, and have more than heart can wish. Have no outward trouble, as other men, or as the saints have. Nor any uneasiness of mind, on account of sin and their eternal state. They have been at ease from their youth. Satan, that has the possession of them, keeps the goods in peace. And their consciences are seared as with a red hot iron, and they are past feeling. Though they are far from having any true solid peace of mind. And such persons are generally scorers of the saints, and load them with their gibes and jeers in a most insolent manner; which makes it very irksome and grievous to bear.

"And with the contempt of the proud": Who are proud of their natural abilities. Of their wealth and riches, and of their honors and high places. And such are generally scorers, and deal in proud wrath. And, through their pride, persecute the poor saints with their reproaches, and by other ways (see Prov. 21:24). Some understand by these characters, "that are at ease", or "quiet", and are "proud", or "excellent", as the phrases may be rendered. Such described by them as are the objects, and not the authors, of scorn and contempt. Even the saints, who are the quiet in the land, and the excellent in the earth. Those precious sons of Zion, who are disesteemed by the men of the world (Psalm 35:20).

The proud, we decided, were lost and were living for just the here and now. They had not humbled themselves and come to the Lord. They felt that they were their own boss, and they did not want anyone telling them what to do. Those that are at ease possibly, means that they were well off financially and thought they did not need God. They ridiculed the psalmist for his stand he had made for God. They actually hated the psalmist and what he stood for.

Psalm 123 Questions

1. What does dwellest mean?
2. Where is Jesus in heaven?
3. Where is our only real help?
4. Who was a good example of someone on earth who looked into heaven?
5. Where should believers be looking?
6. What is "behold" telling us?
7. Where can we read about signs we should be watching for?
8. Where is the contempt in chapter 123:3, coming from?
9. Who are the proud?