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# HELP FROM HEAVEN'S THRONE

*Psalm 123*  
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## INTRODUCTION

Today, slogans exist, such as “My body, my choice,” “Gender is not binary,” and “Love is love.” Then there are those “Coexist” bumper stickers. These signs and slogans represent the god of our culture, the self. Recently, I read that The Golden Rule has lost its position. It has been replaced with the Platinum Rule: Treat others how **they** want to be treated. These people expect everyone, expect you, to bow down to their desires. They are a god unto themselves. Pride reigns in their kingdom. It has also bled into the faith community with some of the deconstructionists. They believe they have arrived at a “new” understanding of God and the Bible, often leading to the abandonment of the Christian faith. They are no different from those who believe in the Platinum rule. They, too, place themselves on the throne of their kingdom and decide what the truth is.

Today, Christianity is seen as an outdated belief system. Research claims Christianity is slowly dying in America.<sup>1</sup> Considering these issues, Christian parents are questioned if they send their children to public schools. While others may withdraw from society to escape this godless influence. In the workplace, Christians are asked to conform to gender identity, where they are encouraged to call a person by their chosen pronoun, once again expecting you to bow down to their desires. Corruption fills our country’s leadership. The rich get richer while the poor get poorer. But even the poor demand comforts without sacrifice. “I deserve this, and that” is their mantra. Pride permeates our society; everyone expects everyone else to bow to their desires. Adding insult to injury to the reputation of Christ, the public points to the horrible reports of physical and emotional abuse within the church doors. Pride grows quietly within church leadership, protecting its name, brand, or reputation.

God appears to be mocked with little to no repercussions. Have you ever found yourself asking, “What is going on?” Or worse, “God, where are you, and what are You doing?” It challenges your faith, doesn’t it. It may even cause you to doubt. When is enough, enough? What are we supposed to do when we live in this fallen world as it accelerates toward godlessness? How will we think and live as we journey to the celestial city? If these statements or questions resonate with you, you might find yourself on the same path as the psalmist of Psalm 123, our passage for this morning. Before we begin, let’s pray.

## ITS STRUCTURE

This morning we will be looking at Psalm 123. It is a short psalm with only four verses. It is one of the shortest psalms in the Bible. But that does not make it any less impactful. What we can draw from its brevity is summed up best by Spurgeon quoting Luther saying,

*“This Psalm (as you see) is but short, and therefore a very fit example to show the force of prayer not to consist in many words, but in fervency of spirit. For great and weighty matters may be comprised in a few words, if they proceed from the spirit and the unspeakable groanings of the heart, especially when our necessity is such as will not allow*

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<sup>1</sup> [Is Christianity Declining? Why Christianity is Dying in America and Growing Elsewhere | Mike P. Taylor \(patheos.com\)](#)

*any long prayer. Every prayer is long enough if it is fervent and comes from a heart that understands the needs of the saints.”*

Sometimes a few may be all that we can muster when struggling in this world, and that’s okay. Follow along as I read it.

*To you I lift up my eyes,  
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!  
Behold, as the eyes of servants  
look to the hand of their master,  
as the eyes of a maidservant  
to the hand of her mistress,  
so our eyes look to the LORD our God,  
till he has mercy upon us.  
Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.  
Our soul has had more than enough  
of the scorn of those who are at ease,  
of the contempt of the proud.*

It is considered a lament psalm expressing deep sorrow, grief, or regret. Normal laments contain the following elements:

1. An invocation or prayer
2. A plea (for God's help)
3. The complaint
4. Confession of sin or assertion of one's innocence,
5. States their confidence in the Lord,
6. Ends with a blessing.<sup>2</sup>

This lament psalm is unique because it contains no confession of sin or assertion of innocence, no statement of confidence in the Lord, and it does not end with any blessing. It ends abruptly with a complaint. There’s no resolution in the psalmist’s heart. It feels like one is at the end of their rope with the repeated words in verses 3-4, “we have had more than enough.”

I also want to draw your attention to the change in voice from verse 1 to verse 2. It begins with a solo voice in verse 1, “To you, I lift up my eyes.” But then, in verse 2, the psalmist is joined by the congregation, who affirm that “our eyes are on the Lord our God,” and it continues with plural pronouns. Therefore, this psalm is a communal lament. When you suffer, we all suffer. Christianity is a community pilgrimage. You should never feel alone in your journey home.

## IT’S SETTING

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<sup>2</sup> Patterson, R. D., Köstenberger, A. J. (2011). Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology. United States: Kregel Academic.

Let's look at the setting. As Pastor Jon pointed out last week, God's people sang these songs on the way to the temple. We are unsure of the exact setting or historical situation of this psalm, although some of the original vocabulary links it to the book of Nehemiah.<sup>3</sup> However, throughout Israel's history, the people faced hostile conditions from their adversaries on multiple occasions. But imagine with me for a moment. The Israelites had an extensive history with the Lord. He delivered his people out of slavery through miraculous signs and wonders. He divided the sea before them, so they went through the dry land. He guided, provided for, and disciplined them in the wilderness. He gave them instructions for the tabernacle and dwelt among them. He cast out nations before them, ushering them into the promised land. He empowered them to build a mighty city, with the culminating event being the completion of the Temple and God's spirit filling it (1 Kings 8:11). But years later, His Spirit would leave the temple (Ezekiel 10).

The people would experience great suffering due to their sin and rebellion. Yet, amid their dark past, there remained a faithful remnant. They understood their plight. They too experienced the repercussions of God's discipline and punishment. They faced exile, ridicule, scorn, and contempt. They were, at times, the laughingstock of the nations. But the faithful continued to travel to the temple, seeking the Lord, waiting, and wondering when He would return. They sought after God's mercy. This is our message this morning: **Pilgrims have a proper view of God and themselves when pleading with the Lord for mercy while weary on the journey.** Let's return to our psalm and verse one.

## OUR PURSUIT (v.1)

<sup>1</sup> *To you I lift up my eyes,*

*O you who are enthroned in the heavens!*

Last week, Psalm 121 began with, "I lift my eyes to the hills." In Psalm 122:2, the psalmist writes, "**Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!**" Here, we have "I lift up my eyes." Notice the progression. In 121, he sees his surroundings on his journey to the Lord. When he enters the city, nearer he draws. But in this psalm, he now fixes his eyes on the Lord, and his surroundings fade. Amid our struggles, the Lord may appear distant. But as we seek Him, He gives us eyes to see Him more clearly. This is the first step in pursuing Him.

## WITH THEIR EYES

**The first and most obvious point: To have a proper view of God, you must seek Him first.** Verse 1 speaks of sight. Have you ever heard, "Keep your eyes on the road?" Why do we tell new drivers, as well as old ones, to do this? Because if you remove your sight from the road, you risk disaster. What you look upon will direct your path. For them, this may have meant their physical eyes as they approach the Temple. For us, this speaks of our hearts. Remember, this was the issue in the garden. Eve "saw" that the tree was good for food and was a delight to the "eyes." Adam and Eve took the eyes of their heart off the Lord and moved them to their present surroundings. This is what happens when we take our eyes off the Lord. We fall into temptation. We get distracted by what we see around us. Do you ever look around at your workplace, family, church, and the news and get discouraged? Or maybe it's looking at yourself and your life, and feel defeated. Pilgrim, move your eyes off the world and yourself and lift them up to the Lord.

## TO THE ONE ENTHRONED

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<sup>3</sup> Estes, Daniel J. 2019. [Psalms 73–150](#). Edited by E. Ray. Clendenen. Vol. 13. New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.

When you seek Him, you will see Him as who He is. And who is the Lord? The one enthroned in the heavens! Enthronement symbolizes kingship. No image permeates the Bible more than that of the king. Human kings were physically impressive, honored, and respected by their people. They were the dispenser of protection, justice, and mercy and a symbol of power and authority.

For the people of God, they saw Him as the eternal king, the immortal king, and the immutable king. The king who reigns over all peoples, all nations, and the heavenly realms.

Isaiah (45:7) writes, concerning the LORD,

*"I form light and create darkness;  
I make well-being and create calamity;  
I am the LORD, who does all these things."*

Then in Lamentations (3:37-38),

*<sup>37</sup> Who has spoken and it came to pass,  
unless the Lord has commanded it?  
<sup>38</sup> Is it not from the mouth of the Most High  
that good and bad come?*

No place exists where His power and authority do not reach. David wrote, *<sup>7</sup> Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.*" No circumstance or situation exists that He is not over. At this very moment, He is upholding the universe by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, take heed and comfort pilgrims; He is sovereign over the cosmos, world, nation, and your very own personal struggles. He is trustworthy and true. Lift your eyes to the Lord, who is enthroned in the heavens.

## OUR POSTURE (v.2)

When we have a proper view of God, this leads to a proper posture toward Him. Listen as I read verse 2.

*<sup>2</sup> Behold, as the eyes of servants  
look to the hand of their master,  
as the eyes of a maidservant  
to the hand of her mistress,  
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,  
till he has mercy upon us.*

## IN SUBMISSION

Four times in verses 1-2, the psalmist refers to "eyes." The eye represents many things in scripture. It can refer to physical sight and human insight and knowledge. When scripture speaks of the "eyes of the Lord," they refer to His omniscience and protection. But here, the "eyes" of servants express humility.<sup>4</sup>

Servants and masters, and maidservants and mistresses are difficult to comprehend today. In the days of the Old Testament, slaves belonged to their masters. They were considered part of the family and were loved by their

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<sup>4</sup> Ryken, Leland, et al. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Electronic ed., InterVarsity Press, 2000.

masters.<sup>5</sup> (Although I am sure cruel masters existed in those days, that was not the norm.) Servants relied on masters for sustenance, shelter, and safety. For this reason, they readily accepted the will of their master. Do you have a proper view of the Lord? How do you respond to the Lord's will when what you see around you conflicts with His character? The purifying fire which burns the impurities out of your life occurs when you must see with eyes of faith, die to yourself and accept God's will in difficult situations. Shortly after her husband was murdered, Elisabeth Elliot wrote in a letter to her parents the following,

*"I know you are all wondering how I am getting along. I can only say that the peace I have literally passes all possible understanding. . . . "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and song." I have learned, I believe, the lesson which Amy Carmichael speaks of in her poem — "In acceptance lieth peace." How true. I accept, gratefully, from the hand of God, this experience."*

And almost fifty years later, she wrote,

*God included the hardships of my life in his original plan. Nothing takes him by surprise. Nothing is for nothing. His plan is to make me holy, and hardship is indispensable for that as long as I live in this hard old world. All I have to do is accept it. (Be Still My Soul, 32)<sup>6</sup>*

Most of what we see and experience will only make sense with Christ. I believe many Christians halt their growth and conformity to the image of Christ when they refuse to accept God's will for their lives. Essentially, they limit their own obedience to the One enthroned in the heavens, the Creator and sustainer of life. They say, "This I will accept, but that?! I am not accepting that!" Do you have limits to your obedience?

## WITH PATIENCE

So, how long do we wrestle with ourselves? How long do we plead and seek the Lord in these situations? How long is long enough? How long are we to endure the suffering? Until he has mercy. We don't get to decide when we have had enough. We don't get to decide when God ought to grant us mercy. We don't get to tell the King when He has pushed the limits. Look, I am not saying this is easy. But remember, this is a communal lament; therefore, you are not alone. We travel this path of conformity to Christ through trial together. Unity is needed to carry one another's burdens. Therefore, pray for one another.

J.I. Packer sums this text well when he says, "True saints, like obedient servants, look continuously, for there is never a time when they are off duty [meaning, every moment of your life falls under the Lord's will]. Upon the Lord, they look expectantly, looking for supply, succor, and safety from his hands, waiting that he may have mercy upon them.[Meaning, we know all that we need for life comes from the hand of the Lord.] They have no other confidence, and they learn to look submissively, waiting patiently for the Lord, seeking both in activity and suffering to glorify his name. [So, if you are living life or enduring long periods of endless struggle and suffering, we constantly seek to glorify the Lord.] When they are smitten with the rod [discipline by the Father's hand], they turn their eyes imploringly to the hand which chastens, hoping that mercy will soon abate the rigor of the affliction."<sup>7</sup> [Meaning,

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<sup>5</sup> Brooks, James A. 2003. ["Slave, Servant."](#) In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, and Trent C. Butler, 1511. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> [Nothing Is for Nothing: Accepting Loss and Finding Peace | Desiring God](#)

<sup>7</sup> Packer, J. I. 1993. ["Introduction."](#) In *Psalms*, 263. Crossway Classic Commentaries. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

they look to the Father until He decides to terminate the trial.] Faithful pilgrims continually and humbly look to the enthroned Lord, **desiring** to accept His will.

## OUR PLEADING (V.3-4)

How can we accept the Lord's will as humble servants when it hurts? How do we accept His will when the world does not bow to our King? By seeking God's mercy. Follow along as I read verses 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us,  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.*

<sup>4</sup> *Our soul has had more than enough  
of the scorn of those who are at ease,  
of the contempt of the proud.*

## FOR MERCY (V.3)

The psalmist expresses a valid response when the plans of the proud and haughty continue onward without any godly consequences. We should feel the tension between prevailing godlessness and the desire for triumphant godliness. We want God's name proclaimed. We want to be vindicated amid the contempt and scorn we see in the world. This psalm permits us, as well as many others, to ask for mercy, to beg for mercy, as a servant under the hand of the master. But here's the difference between those of the world and righteous saints: Saints understand they deserve any and all suffering the Lord wills in their life. Who are we to question God? We don't deserve all the goodness we experience in this life. Our salvation should be enough to be content with the Lord. But what grace God bestows upon us in that He allows us to seek Him, know Him, and enjoy Him while waiting for Him to bring us home. This is God's mercy. And what is mercy? Mercy is the compassionate disposition to forgive an offender or adversary and to help or spare him in his sorry plight.<sup>8</sup> Who is the Lord? <sup>6</sup> *"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* (Ex. 34:6-7) This is who God is! He is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin over and over again. And He will not change! This is our king whom we serve.

## WHILE WEARY (V.4)

But we can be wearied by the world. Wearied by sin and rebellion in the world and ourselves, we endure and seek the Lord. This is verse 4: the pleading of a weary saint. My soul has had more than enough contempt and scorn from those at ease, from the proud and arrogant. So these messages in our culture, "My body, my choice", "Treat me the way I want to be treated!" "Who are you to tell me how to live my life?" "Where is your God?" wear on us.

So the psalm's three elements, the heavenly throne, the master's hand, and the unendurable hatred, fit convincingly together. Where real power and real malice are pitched against a righteous cause, the people of God know what to

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<sup>8</sup> Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. 1988. "[Mercy.](#)" In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2:1440. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

do. They keep patiently on with the task before them; but even more important, they look constantly in prayer to the One who alone is both pledged to uphold the right and able to frustrate the wrong.<sup>9</sup>

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

So, when we see the slogans, how do we respond? We look to Jesus, the one enthroned in the heavens. He was crowned with twisted thorns, beaten with a rod, and spit upon, mocked as a king. And while he hung there on the cross, reviled, what was His response? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

We ourselves were the scorers. But now we are His servants. And servants become like their masters. Therefore, we cry for mercy for ourselves and the lost and unbelieving souls in the world who mock our living God.

Paul had a proper view of God’s holiness and his own sinfulness. In his letter to Titus 3:3-7, he writes,

*<sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

And then again in His letter to the Ephesians (2:1-10),

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,~~<sup>7</sup>so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.~~<sup>8</sup>~~For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.~~*

At the center of these texts is mercy. According to mercy, and because of it, we are saved. And those who have a proper view of our Lord Jesus, and proper of themselves, will be like Bartimaeus. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Even rebuked, he continued, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” All he asked for were eyes to see. We may do the same. We cry for mercy and ask for eyes of faith.

Let us then remember,

*<sup>14</sup>Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)*

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<sup>9</sup> Wilcock, Michael. 2001. [\*The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People of God\*](#). Edited by J. A. Motyer. Vol. 2. The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press.