

Look Up!

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Preacher: Rev. Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Would you please turn with me to the passage that we read in Psalm 123, Psalm 123, and reading again at verse 1.

To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens. To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens.

Just for a few moments I would like to focus on this great psalm with you that speaks about looking to the Lord.

It's a psalm that's theme is really looking up, looking up. And we're going to look at the passage under two very simple headings, the psalmist's posture and the psalmist's plea.

Your minister can normally get three alliteration points, I can only get two, but I'm getting it eventually. The psalmist's posture and the psalmist's plea.

[1 : 06] First we have the psalmist's posture in verses 1 and 2. And here the psalmist speaks about his posture of dependence upon the Lord. The psalmist speaks about his posture of dependence upon the Lord.

And he begins by affirming that he's looking to the Lord in verse 1. To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens.

The psalmist is emphatic as he says, to you I lift up my eyes. This is an expression of absolute trust, absolute dependence. As we'll see in verses 3 and 4, the psalmist is in a difficult situation where he feels like he's reached rock bottom.

He feels like he's reached breaking point. And in his painful and perplexing providence, he turns his eyes, the organ of longing and desire, to the Lord and the Lord alone.

And the psalmist describes the one he's looking up to as the one enthroned in the heavens. The psalms are focused on this idea that the Lord is enthroned.

[2 : 12] The Lord is sovereign. In Psalm 9 we sing, the Lord sits enthroned forever. He has established his throne for justice and he judges the world with righteousness.

Psalm 103 that we sung, the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all. Psalm 113, the Lord is high above all nations and his glory above the heavens.

Psalm 115, our God is in the heavens and he does all that he pleases. And throughout God's word we find that when the Lord's people experience times of trouble and trial, they remind themselves of this fact that the Lord is sovereign.

The Lord is enthroned. We find Hezekiah and he's been threatened by Assyria and the Assyrian king Sennacherib. And he prays to the God who is enthroned between the cherubim, the one whom he describes as the maker of heaven and earth.

We find Nehemiah and he's dealing with the difficult and daunting task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by the Babylonian empire.

[3 : 27] And he prays to the great and awesome God of heaven. And that is the same God whom we go to in every experience of life.

We look to the one who dwells in heaven. We look to the one who is enthroned over the cosmos.

And we preach to our souls. In fact, we sing to our souls, the Lord is sovereign.

The Lord reigns. In a sermon on the sovereignty of God, John Piper gives seven exhortations. Let us stand in awe of the sovereign authority and freedom and wisdom and power of God.

Let us never trifle with life as though it were a small or light affair. Let us marvel at our own salvation that God bought it and wrought it with sovereign power and we are not our own.

Let us groan over the God-belittling man-centeredness of much of our culture and much of the church. Let us be bold at the throne of grace, knowing that our prayers for the most difficult things can be answered.

[4 : 36] For nothing is too hard for our God. Let us rejoice that our evangelism will not be in vain because there is no sinner so hard that the sovereign grace of God cannot break through.

And what a comfort that is for those of us on a Monday morning who feel like just putting in the resignation letter that nothing is too hard for a sovereign God.

And let us be thrilled and calm in these days of great upheaval because the victory belongs to God and no purposes that he wills to accomplish can be stopped.

God is sovereign. And in verse 2, the psalmist continues by speaking about how and why he's looking to the sovereign God.

We need, 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.

[5 : 40] The psalmist uses an analogy at the beginning of verse 2. He speaks about the eye of a servant being upon the hand of his master. He speaks about the eye of a maidservant being on the hand of her mistress.

It is the relationship of a subordinate to a superior. And the psalmist claims that he and his fellow believers are looking to the Lord our God in a similar way.

Now some take this as meaning that the psalmist is simply acknowledging that the Lord is sovereign and that he is the Lord's servant and that he is to serve the Lord.

He is to wait on the Lord. He is to obey the Lord's commands. He is just to look to the Lord waiting on the Lord's instruction. And there is certainly truth in this. But that is not the emphasis of the psalmist in this psalm.

In the ancient Near East, servants were dependent upon their masters for everything. Food came from the hand of the master. Clothing came from the hand of the master.

[6 : 41] Shelter came from the hand of the master. And the psalmist is saying that he is looking up to the Lord. He is depending upon the Lord in a similar fashion.

He is looking to the Lord for everything. And the psalmist develops that in the latter half of verse 2. As he writes, Till he has mercy on us.

This word mercy is a significant word. It means to bend over. To stoop down. It speaks of the kindness of a superior toward an inferior.

It speaks of help being provided by one who is strong to one who is weak. And that is who the psalmist is looking to. And that is what he is waiting for. This is the God who is enthroned in the heaven.

And who stoops down to help his people. This is the God who dispenses grace. Dispenses favor. Dispenses blessing from his heavenly throne. This is the God who doesn't need any support.

[7 : 41] Any service from his people. Instead he stoops down to provide them with his strength. His support. His sustenance. And all the psalmist can do is wait for this.

Did you note that lovely phrase? Till he has mercy. So often the Lord's people have trouble waiting on him.

So often the Lord's people have difficulties with the Lord's calendar. The Lord's diary. The Lord's time keeping. We find Abraham making a real mess of his domestic life.

When he fails to wait on the Lord. And the reverberations of Abraham's failure to wait on the Lord. Are still being felt even today. Thousands of years later. We find Israel making a golden calf.

When they fail to wait on the Lord. But here the psalmist thinks. I'm going to look up to the Lord. And I'm going to wait on him. Till he has mercy.

[8 : 44] Now friends. In these verses we find the psalmist adopting. This posture of dependence. As he lifts up his eyes to the Lord. And that is so many gospel driven Christ centred applications for us.

In Jesus. We see the one who calls us to pray. And in Matthew 6 that we read. He tells his disciples to pray to the one who is their father.

But he also reminds them. That this is their father in heaven. In his book on the Lord's Prayer. Derek Prime writes. As we look up. Guided by our saviour's words.

We see him as our father in heaven. Heaven is the unique vantage point. From which everything on earth is seen. It is from heaven that our father speaks. From heaven that our father sends his help. From heaven that our father sends his blessings to come. All authority and power are his. With him as our father. We have every encouragement to pray.

[9 : 44] Jesus calls on us to pray. To the one who is our father. In heaven. The one who is enthroned. In Jesus we also see the one.

Who embodies a life of personal prayerful dependence. We see that in Mark's gospel. He prays before going to preach in the Galilee region. He prays after feeding the 5,000.

And before walking on the water. He prays as he stands in Gethsemane. Facing the prospect of the cross. But it is in John's gospel. That we see the personal prayerful dependence of Jesus.

On clearest display. In John 13 he says to the disciples. I am going to the cross. In John 14 he speaks about the arrival of Satan.

And all his dark powers. In John 15 he speaks about the world's hatred of him. In John 16 he tells the disciples. That he will be deserted by all.

[10 : 43] And then in John 17 verse 1. Having said all of these things. Having spoken about his suffering. Spoken about his cross. Spoken about his rejection.

We read in verse 1 of John 17. That he lifted his eyes up to heaven. And he prayed. Father the hour has come. Jesus shows his disciples.

He shows his followers. He shows you and I. That whatever might be taking place in our lives. We can bring it to Abba. We can bring it to our heavenly father.

We can bring it. To the Lord our God. As the psalmist says. But finally in Jesus. We see the one who answers prayer. The gospel makes it clear.

That the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus. The gospel makes it clear. That no one. Can see the father. Unless they have seen Jesus. In fact. To see Jesus.

[11 : 43] Is to see the father. The gospel makes it clear. That Jesus reveals the very heart of God. To his people. And in the gospel. We see Jesus responding to those.

Who look to him. Who wait on him. For mercy. In Matthew 9. He heals two blind men. Who cry out to him. For mercy. Matthew 15. He heals the daughter.

Of a Syrophenician woman. Who cries out. For mercy. Matthew 17. He heals the demon possessed son. Of a man. Who cries out to him. For what?

For mercy. Jesus is the one. Who hears and responds. To the cries of the afflicted. The cries for mercy. Today friends.

These verses are a call to us. As individuals. But I think. I really am. More and more burdened about that. These days. The Psalms are a corporate songbook.

[12 : 37] Not simply an individual songbook. And so these verses are called to the church. To adopt a posture of dependence. When it comes to our relationship.

With our sovereign God. Our covenant Lord. Matthew Henry writes. The greatest of men. Must become a beggar. When it has to do with Christ.

And that's what these verses are teaching us. About prayer. It's not about our spiritual strength. It's not about our ability with words. Or quantity with words. My friend. If you're. If you're put off about going to a prayer meeting.

In this congregation. Because you're afraid. About how long you have to pray for. That's not what prayer is about. It's about looking to the Lord. It's about expressing our helplessness.

And dependence upon him. And it's about saying to him. We can't. But you can. Prayer is about acknowledging our dependence upon the Lord. And I said to our own congregation yesterday.

[13 : 38] How can we expect to receive the Lord's blessing as a congregation. If we give so little thought to meeting together for prayer as a congregation. If we're not coming together collectively and corporately.

During the week. And acknowledging our dependence upon him. A posture of dependence.

And this brings us second. To the psalmist's plea. Verses 3 and 4. And here the psalmist speaks about his plea for deliverance from the Lord.

The psalmist begins by pleading for mercy. In verse 3. We read. Have mercy upon us O Lord. Have mercy upon us. The psalmist has spoken about the Lord's mercy.

In verses 1 and 2. He's spoken about looking up to the Lord. Verse 1. He said that he's going to keep looking. He's going to keep waiting. He's going to keep depending. Until the Lord has mercy.

[14 : 42] Verse 2. But now in verse 3. We find the psalmist refusing to hold back. As he calls out to the Lord. For mercy. And we can note that the psalmist doesn't cry once.

He cries out. Have mercy upon us O Lord. Have mercy upon us. It is an impassioned plea. For the Lord to intervene. The Lord to act. The Lord to do something about the situation facing the psalmist.

The psalmist isn't simply dependent upon the Lord. He is desperately dependent upon the Lord. His eyes have focused on the Lord. And as his eyes focus on the Lord.

The words begin to gush out. This pious and broken man. Comes before the Lord. With clear words. Undiluted words. That give us an insight into his heart.

And in verses 3 and 4. The psalmist gives the reason for his impassioned plea. We read. For we have had more than enough of contempt.

[15:42] Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease. Of the contempt. Of the proud. The psalmist speaks about having had enough.

We have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul. Our breath. Our very life. Has had more than enough.

And this word enough means to be full. To be satisfied. Contempt has been poured out on the psalmist and his fellow believers. Until it's overflowing.

And the psalmist is saying. We've had our fill. We can't take any more. Lord. Would you please be merciful.

Would you please step down. Would you please intervene. In our situation. Because we can't take any more. Friends. It's important to remember. That the Lord knows when we've had enough.

[16:37] But sometimes in our experiences. And you know this yourselves. We can really feel like we've had enough. Sometimes the Lord's people find themselves crying out.

I really can't take any more of this. Sometimes the pilgrim of heaven begins to feel that the journey is too much. For him. For her.

And perhaps that's you today. Perhaps you've been faithfully serving the Lord. Perhaps you've been slogging along the paths of righteousness.

As Dale Ralph Davis describes the Christian life. And I love that description. Christian life's not about skipping along. And dancing along. It's about slogging along the paths of righteousness.

But you're beginning to find the slog is just too much. Things are becoming increasingly harder and harder for you. You're at the point of saying.

[17:36] I can't take any more. I can't go on. I've had my fill from this cup of drowning provinces.

I've taken the cup again and again. But I just can't take any more. And this psalm is a large strange way of reminding you, my friend.

That you're not alone. And that his people can often feel this way. His people can often say. We have had more than enough. And finally, the psalmist speaks about what's making his life so unbearable at the end of verse 4.

He speaks about the scorn of those who are secure. These people have big salaries. They have big houses. They always seem to land on their feet.

They're prosperous. They're comfortable. They're content. And they find concepts such as sin and judgment and salvation to be foolish. They ridicule the psalmist saying. You can't really believe all that nonsense.

It's just outdated. It's just irrelevant. And then the psalmist speaks about the contempt of the proud. They're high. And they're lofty. And they think they can handle any and every situation on their own.

[18:44] They've never asked anyone for help. They're fiercely independent. And they're treating the psalmist. This man who is saying, I can't, but God can. This man who has adopted this posture of dependence and let out a plea for deliverance.

They're treating him with contempt. And sometimes scorn and contempt can really shake the Lord's people, can't it? We see how shaken Hezekiah was when the Assyrians taunted him and his nation and his God.

And we're told that he tore his clothes and he dressed himself in sackcloth. We see how shaken Nehemiah was when Zimbat and Tobiah taunted him and didn't simply taunt him.

They threatened him. And Nehemiah prays that the Lord would show them no mercy. That is how shaken he is. Do you ever feel that shaken where you're almost on the verge of saying, don't show this person any mercy, Lord?

I'm sure we don't, but that's how Nehemiah felt. We see how shaken Jeremiah was when the people rejected his God-given message and they taunted him and they threatened him and they even tortured him.

[19:57] And Jeremiah is left in chapter 20 cursing the very day of his birth, wishing he'd never been born. Throughout their history, the Lord's people were often mocked for their belief in their

covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.

And that is the same today. As Christians, we believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man, the God-man. As Christians, we accept the miracles of Jesus as they're recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And though we may struggle to understand or explain the miracles, we believe that they happen. As Christians, we sing that the blood of Jesus is precious. And we proclaim his death as the once for all sacrifice for our sins.

And we say that there is salvation in no other name, no other place, no other person but this Jesus. As Christians, we rejoice in an empty tomb and the physical bodily resurrection of our Saviour.

As Christians, we affirm that Jesus ascended into heaven, that he is reigning from heaven's throne and that he is coming again. As Christians, we acknowledge that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, the great white throne.

[21 : 07] And not only us, but our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. As Christians, we look forward to a new heaven and new earth that Jesus will establish and inaugurate by the word of his power.

And the world laughs at this. We live in a world that holds the Lord and his people in contempt. We live in a world where the Christian foundations of Western society are being dismantled and destroyed, it seems, on a daily basis.

We live in a world where it's becoming increasingly difficult to be a follower of Jesus. We live in a world that Francis Schaeffer described 50 years ago as post-Christian.

And nothing's changed. Even this island, friends, is post-Christian. And you just need to go on Facebook or We Love Story to see how aggressively post-Christian it is.

And there are times when we can be hurt over this and indignant over this. And the question the Lord asks us is, But what did you expect?

[22 : 20] Jesus didn't say, The world loved me and it will love you also. Neither did he say, The world hated me, but don't worry, it will love you.

Jesus said, The world hated me first and it will hate you also. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

So what does this psalm encourage us to do? Well, the psalm, like all the psalms of ascents, or songs of ascents, your minister and I have a wee bit of a debate over what the actual word is.

But this psalm, like all the songs, psalms of ascents, encourages us to remember that we are pilgrims. This world isn't home.

It's a wilderness, as John Bunyan used to say. We're just passing through with the promise that the best is still to come. My friend, is that how you view this world?

[23 : 22] Is that how you view this life? You're not going to build your bigger barns, because you're just passing through as a pilgrim. And this psalm also encourages us to pray for the Lord's mercy as we live in this wilderness world.

Sometimes that mercy comes in the Lord relieving us from the contempt and the scorn that we're experiencing. And sometimes that mercy comes in the Lord giving us the strength, the grace to keep on going in the face of the contempt and the scorn that we're experiencing.

But however that mercy comes, we remember that it's come at the expense of the contempt and the scorn that Jesus experienced for us. We receive mercy because Jesus, the supreme singer of the Psalms, cried out from the cross, Have mercy upon me, O Lord, have mercy upon me, for I have had more than enough of contempt.

My soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud. And he received none. Because as the hymn writer says, Bearing shame and scoffing rude in my place, condemned he stood.

He calls out, Father, is there no word of comfort for me? Father, is there no look of mercy for me? And there is only darkness and silence from above as the scorn and contempt from below gathers momentum.

[24 : 57] That is the price that Jesus paid for the salvation of his people. John Piper writes, For redeemed sinners, every good thing, indeed every bad thing that God turns for our good, was obtained for us by the cross of Christ.

Apart from the death of Christ, sinners get nothing but judgment. Apart from the cross of Christ, there is only condemnation. Therefore, everything that you enjoy in Christ as a Christian is owing to

the death of Christ.

Think of this, friends. You and I can ask for mercy. And we can receive mercy because the Lord has secured that mercy.

He has secured that grace. He has secured that favor for us with his own blood. Not just the favor and grace of forgiveness and salvation from our sins, but the favor and grace that enables us to just keep on going.

And so I want to close by asking, are you looking to the Lord and calling on him for mercy? Are you looking to him to give you that help, that mercy to be faithful to him even in the hardest of situations as you wait for the fullness of his salvation?

[26 : 51] He secured it with his own blood, friend. And all we're called to do is adopt that posture of dependence and let out that plea for deliverance.

Amen. let's close by singing to the Lord's praise and words of that psalm, psalm 123, the Scottish altar version on page 417.

O thou that dwellest in the heavens, I lift my eyes to thee, behold the servant's eyes to look, their master's hand to see. As handmaid's eyes her mistress' hand, so do our eyes depend upon the Lord our God until to us he mercy's end.

O Lord, be gracious to us and to us gracious be, because replenished with contempt exceedingly early. Our soul is filled with scorn of those that at their ease abide, and with the insolent contempt of those that swell in Christ.

We'll stand to sing his verses to this piece. O thou that dwellest in the heavens, I lift my eyes to thee, behold the servant, and sighs to look, their master's hand to see.

[28 : 35] O thou that dwellest in the heavens, O thou that dwellest into.

So do our life multiv muscular time upon the Lord the Lord As he mercy sang.

O Lord, be gracious to us, unto us gracious be, if all's replenished with contempt, exceedingly agree.

Our soul is filled with shorn of thoughts, that that there is abide, and with the insolent content of those that swell in might.

Amen. The Lord our God, we give you praise, and we give you thanks, that you are one who is rich in grace, who is rich in mercy, and that that mercy, that grace, has been secured for your people, with the blood of your own Son.

[30 : 45] And our prayer is that we would simply be those, as individuals and as a congregation, who adopt that posture of dependence, and look up to you, and wait on you, until you have mercy.

And that we would be those who are not afraid to make that plea for deliverance, that we wouldn't be afraid to cry out for mercy, for grace, for favour, when we may find ourselves completely overwhelmed, when we may feel that we cannot take any more, because we rejoice in the fact that you are willing and able to provide grace to help in time of need.

So encourage those gathered here, and all those whom we know and love, and may you keep us, and may you keep us keeping on. And we pray now that grace, mercy and peace, and from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God would be with each, and every one of us now, until the end of the age, as we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.