

HAVE MERCY UPON US, O LORD

Psalm 123: 1-4 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Rudyard Kipling wrote a profound poem entitled “If.” Two stanzas of his poem apply to Psalm 123 as we begin this little psalm about our eyes. Kipling wrote, “If you can dream - and not make dreams your master; If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim; If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster And treat those two impostors just the same; If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, Or watch the things you gave your life to broken, And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:” Just that much of his poem “If” talks about what we choose to do when we are shown contempt. The poem asks the question, “What will we do when things are breaking apart before our eyes, when we see those we love the most spurning our love, our words, and our very person.” The psalmist in Psalm 123 was facing that so clearly. This psalm is a little psalm about our eyes. As one preacher said of the psalm, “The “eyes” have it.” The focus of our eyes is so important. The direction of our eyes is so critical. The devotion of our eyes is such a priority, and the desire of our eyes—that desire being for mercy is so needed. The whole psalm is about fixing our eyes on the Lord. To hang on when our fingers are losing their grip, to hang on when our eyes have given up hoping, to hang on when our friends keep saying—“Give it up!”—these are vital subjects this psalm is addressing. Psalm 123 is a fervent prayer of faith. J. Sidlow Baxter once said so poignantly, “Our loved ones may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, or despise our persons—but they are helpless against our prayers.” Praise the Lord our prayers to God can overcome and overwhelm the enemies’ strongholds.

With those words of introduction, I call us for a few moments this morning to examine this psalm about the eyes—your eyes and mine. Where is your focus beloved, in the face of rejection, scorn, mocking and contempt that this psalmist faced? This little psalm about the eyes teaches us as God’s children, Christ’s Bride how to “see” God’s will. Would you examine with me this psalm about the eyes and seek with me to find out how to “see” God’s will in the face of scorn and contempt? This psalm gives us four ways to “see” the will of God. What are they?

OUR DISPOSITION—TO HUMBLY SEE GOD’S WILL IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPT BY LIFTING OUR EYES TO HIM ALONE. (I.)

Notice Psalm 123: 1. “To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!” Do you have good eyesight— with or without corrective lenses? Good eyes are vital for a believer—are your eyes disposed to “see” the will of God? Seeing God’s will and in obedience, doing it, is when we find ourselves becoming fruitful and productive. Many would contend that vision is by far the most important of our five physical

senses. One thing is for sure—vision is the most easily damaged of the five senses. Most of us will do anything necessary—we will do our utmost, our best, to preserve our eyesight. Nevertheless, many believers have severely damaged "spiritual sight." Strangely, it doesn't seem to matter to many believers that their spiritual vision is blurry at best. Spiritual vision that is blurred—is seeing God's truth as the blind man who first saw "men as trees walking." Blurred spiritual vision is vision that sees the truth and looks past it, not being riveted to it. That's an evil disposition with our eyes. Spiritual vision is dim/blurred when we attempt to see what God presents to us in His Word or by His Spirit promptings by looking at it through a stubborn disposition, through a prejudicial disposition, made up minds. Many believers are either unaware of their poor spiritual vision or they know about it, they planned it that way. They're unconcerned about it. Is that your disposition?

As we have been preaching through these psalms of ascent or degrees, psalm 120 is about crying to God for deliverance from lying lips and sharp deceitful tongues. Psalm 121 is about the need to lift our eyes to the hills—and far above the hills to the God who made the hills, to look to Him for deliverance and help in the face of difficult circumstances. Psalm 122 is all about going to the house of the Lord gladly—our spiritual base camp, to assemble in God's presence where we are to worship together. Psalm 122 is also about seeing the people of God, the Jews and Jerusalem as a people so precious to God—and praying for the peace of Jerusalem. Psalm 123 is a psalm teaching us how to "see" or how to discern God's will. This is a prayer to sing to God. It is very short. Prayers should never be measured by their length or by their eloquence, but rather prayers should be measured by their honest authenticity, and their faith, and their fervency. Is that your disposition?

Focus your eyes with me on verse 1. "To You I lift my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!" God is everywhere—omnipresent, yet when we usually think of Him, we think of Him as being high above us! He is high above us—enthroned in the heavens. His location in height above us represents His supernatural power, wisdom and glory. It is not natural for us to lift up our heads or our eyes. We tend most generally to look straight ahead or often to look down. We must make a special effort to lift our eyes and lift up our heads--physically, and spiritually. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus told His disciples about His second coming? In Luke 21: 28, He said, "Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up/look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." We don't know who the psalmist was who wrote these words, but it appears from the context of the 10 anonymous psalms of ascent that the writer may well have been King Hezekiah. When Hezekiah was mocked, scorned and shown contempt by the king of Assyria, Sennacherib and his vile general Rabshekah, what was his disposition? Turn to Isaiah 37: 15-20. I read, "And

Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire. For they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore, they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone are the LORD.” Notice how much verse one of Psalm 123 sounds like Hezekiah praying in Isaiah 37. “To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens.” The focus/disposition of our eyes is so important.

When we were babies, our eyes didn't focus well. When we remain in sin, and let the world have our focus, we rarely stop to lift up our eyes to the Lord where He is enthroned. But when we like Hezekiah, the king and the psalmist here, when we look up to the Lord, we will come to see the same One Hezekiah saw, the same one Moses saw as we read in Hebrews 11: 27, “By faith, Moses left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” As we learn to lift up our heads and our eyes to Jesus, even in the face of scorn and contempt and mocking, we will begin to see by faith Him who is invisible. Beloved, it is possible to even pray without words, simply with the imploring look of our eyes. The disposition of our eyes can be seen by God as—eye prayers. There are times when we cannot say a word, but God will see our disposition, looking up, and He will hear our prayers. He will note our disposition that we are conscious of His presence. He will notice we're looking to Him alone to hear/answer our prayers. He will see our humility looking up to Him. He will see our “spiritual eyes of faith” looking above the storm and piercing through the darkness, through the darkest clouds to His very throne. Looking up shows our Lord we are aware He sees us, thankful He cares, and that we're ready/willing to obey Him. Secondly,

OUR DIRECTION—TO SEE GOD'S WILL IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPT BY FOCUSING ON OUR MASTER'S HAND IN HEAVEN.

(II.) Notice Psalm 123: 2. “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.” Not only does God want us to look up to Him, but as He reaches out His hands to us to help us, he longs for us to look at His nail-pierced hands—our Master's hands. This is so critical! We read the first word in verse 2 as behold. Is this word behold addressed to us or to God? It could be either to notice the eyes of God's servants looking on the hand of their master. When this word behold is addressed to us, then the thrust of the psalm is that we should "behold" our Master in the same way servants are commanded by their

masters with hand signals. This meant the servant kept the direction of his focus often on his master's hand. It almost reminds me of hand signals of a catcher to a pitcher in baseball. When this word behold is addressed by us to God, then it becomes our plea with God to "behold" us as we wait for His instructions.

Doing research on middle-eastern masters reveals they do not always speak to their servants. They more often communicate their instructions to their servants with their hands. Therefore, the servants had to be continuously attentive to catch their masters' or their mistresses' instructions. It's true for us all in every culture. We at times communicate more with our body than with our words. The ability to read "body language" is just as important as understanding verbal language. In David's maskil—Psalm 32: 8, David reveals some of this to us. He writes, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." Both eye movements and hand movements can tell a story. The Word of God is our final authority in every facet of life, but God can, and He often does guide us with His eye or with His hand. God often does speak to us through His creation, through His providence, through other Christians, and through the Holy Spirit's promptings to our spirits, and He even speaks to us by giving us "burdens" in our heart. However, all these "leadings" must be checked against God's Word. If a prompting we believe is of the Spirit should contradict God's Word, then it must be rejected. As we watch God's hand in so many areas of our lives, as He orchestrates so many aspects of our lives, follow His pierced hands. With God's people today, still our direction, our provisions, and our protection all come from our Master's hand. God's hand is never failing. Proverbs 21: 1 is so clear--"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He will." What is true of the king's heart is also true in the heart of God's remnant. By the mere movements of God's hand, He can turn our hearts wherever He will. And amazingly, by looking at God's hands, He sees our eyes upon Him and has mercy upon us.

Notice how long our eyes are to look to the Lord our God and to His hands. The psalmist says we look to the Lord and His hands "til He has mercy upon us." Sometimes we do look, but not patiently until He shows us mercy. Back in the 1980's, the manager of a concert hall got a call from a wealthy woman who lost her large diamond pendant at a concert the night before. She called and asked, "Did you find the diamond pendant I lost last night at your concert hall? The manager replied, "No, we haven't found it, but we'll go look now. Please hold the line." Doing a quick search, the costly diamond pendant was found. When the manager returned to the phone, the woman had not held the line. She hung up and never called again. Her expensive jewelry went unclaimed. Beloved, God holds the line for us. Never quit watching the nail-scarred hands of the Lord. Thirdly,

OUR DEVOTION—TO SEE GOD’S WILL IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPT BY DEEPLY LOOKING TO THE LORD, BEGGING FOR MERCY. (III.)

Notice Psalm 123: 3. “Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.” You may have wondered when we were going to examine the awful plight of the psalmist—as he was facing contempt. Contempt comes from the Hebrew word **buwz**. This word contempt is also the translation of buwz in the KJV. It has many meanings and they all are terrible. To be shown contempt hurts us—it slams us up against a wall. Contempt is equivalent to spitting on us. It means to be shown deep disrespect, to be treated as worthless, vile, worthy of scorn and disdain, it means to despise, to dishonor, to show disgrace, and to treat a person who should be respected as if they are beneath you. It means to spurn, to deride, to disdain, to laugh at, to curl up one’s lip, to slight and pass by, to make light of, to esteem lightly, to care nothing for, to put down, to turn one’s back on, to trample underfoot, to kick at, to be haughty with, to treat as despicable, and to seek to repudiate all a person says. Do you see why the psalmist is devotedly seeking the will of God in the face of such contempt, begging for mercy? Beloved, when you are shown contempt, looking with love and devotion to the One who honors you, who died for you, and who will never leave you or forsake you—that’s the devotional looking to the Lord that cries out for mercy and receives mercy. The psalmist adds not only that he has been shown disrespect and contempt, but he adds, “we have had more than enough of contempt.” The KJV says we are “exceedingly filled with contempt.” Beloved, did you know that even Christians can get up the “miff” tree and treat brothers and sisters with contempt? Some do it to their face, and others do it behind their back, saying one thing to them—as if they love and respect them, but another thing to others. Beloved, it is no small thing with God to treat any other human being with utter contempt, disrespect and dishonor. It is a judgment on others God hates.

Contempt is shown towards bosses behind their backs and it is not uncommon to have “roast preacher” for dinner on Sundays, showing him contempt behind his back to family and friends, or showing contempt to his face. If you are shown contempt—quickly go to God with devotion and tears. Know He never shows His Bride contempt. In marriage, many a spouse has shown his wife or her husband utter contempt and told them contemptuously they are worthless. God hates it. He made each of us in His divine image. No one is worthless to God—contempt is false judgment. When you are shown contempt, “Get alone with God, beg for mercy for yourself, but also for the ones showing you contempt that are living under God’s woe. Romans 2: 1-5 must not be mocked. We read, “Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such

things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.” Beloved, look to God and beg for mercy often for you and those who show you contempt—often even our own brothers, sisters and family members. Fourthly and lastly,

OUR DESIRE--TO SEE GOD’S WILL IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPT BY REMINDING GOD OF OUR PLIGHT, AS WE BEG FOR MERCY. (IV.)

Notice Psalm 123: 4. Remember Psalm 123: 3 states, “For we have had more than enough of contempt.” Now in verse 4 we read, “Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.” We noted earlier we need to hold the line and be patient as we pray for mercy, but God also accepts our pitiful cries for mercy as we remind Him how awful it is getting for us. Two new words stand out in this reminder to God as the psalmist begs for mercy. First is the new word, that is a twin of contempt. This time the psalmist adds the word scorn or the scorning of those who are at ease. The Hebrew word for scorn is not buwz, meaning contempt, but **lahag**. This word means to scoff at us, to deride us as the soldiers did to Jesus, to laugh at us, to mock us, to laugh to scorn, to speak unintelligibly to us—sort of a na, na, na, na na na. It means to treat another as a buffoon, someone to make jokes about, someone to jest about, someone to speak coarse language about, someone to try to trick so as to amuse others, and someone to act and speak undignified in front of. It even means to make disrespectful odd gestures to and to show coarse postures to. Again, like contempt, scorn is an awful scourge to endure from the enemy, and it is even worse when it comes from your brothers and sisters in the Lord, or from your closest friends or your own family. The psalmist adds the words, the contempt of the proud. This word is a hapax legomena—used once only word in the Hebrew. The word is **gaahyone**. This defines the person who is doing the scorning and showing the contempt. Gaahyone means someone who mounts up in triumph over another, who is out to rise, seeking majesty, seeking glory, which God will not give to another. It means to increase over another and to seek to rise above them. It strangely also means to seek to grow up. Whoever has this brand of pride may be fighting a lifelong battle to try to win over another person. It is a pathetic kind of pride for it exposes that person as insecure from growing up days and having no strength to stand without trying to walk upon another—putting them down and showing them disrespect. In the face of it all, the psalmist continues to desire to see God’s will as he looks to the Lord with a humble disposition, a focused direction, a deep devotion, and reminding desire. God will not forget His own. Amen!