

**Text: Psalm 123****Title: “The Quest for God”**

Let's open our Bibles again to Psalm 123. At Thanksgiving we often remember the “pilgrims” who came to our continent to establish a new nation based upon the worship of God. Well long before those pilgrims came there were pilgrims of a different kind who each year made a journey to Jerusalem to worship at one of the three great festivals or holidays (they called them “holy days”). As they would make their way up the hills to the city of Jerusalem, they sang songs, called Songs of Ascent, that were composed for the holy days, just like we have songs that we sing around the holidays. These Psalms of Ascent are found in Psalm 120-134. And we're learning from these songs how to worship our way through the holidays. They challenge us as we're stepping up that we will also press in to God... turning our holidays into holy days. Read Psalm 123:1-4.

Now the psalmist is on his way to worship, but his heart is heavy because of some hurt that has come to him and to his people. In fact he says in vv.3-4, “We have endured much contempt ... more than enough. We have endured more than enough ridicule from arrogant people.” So today I want to talk about what you do when you feel like you've had enough ... when you've had it up to here. The Psalms of Ascent are more than songs ... in many cases they are sighs. The psalmist sighs here ... “I've had enough; Lord have mercy.”

We don't know the circumstances that caused the psalmist to write this song. But he's emotionally spent from the abuse that he has endured. So he's worshipping with a heavy heart. He's going to celebrate a holiday but his spirit is burdened. And in spite of how hard we try to make our Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years happy times, we all know that often it's a mask that hides a lot of pain. We have to learn to worship our way through times when we feel like we've had enough. And that's what he does.

**Psalm 123:1 - I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven.**

**Psalm 123:2 - As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.**

The psalmist is ascending physically up to the Temple, but more importantly he is ascending spiritually ... he's ready to come into God's presence. He's lifting his eyes in order to look to the Lord.

What does it mean to “look to the Lord”? It means TRUST that is demonstrated by WORSHIP and PRAYER.

**TO LOOK TO THE LORD IS TO TRUST HIM.**

You see repeated references to the eyes here in this psalm. The eyes are the instrument of the soul whose quest is for God. And our eyes have to be lifted, otherwise we have the wrong focus. We control the direction of our eyes. The eyes show the quest of our soul. Eyes of lust reflect a soul questing for sinful pleasure. Eyes of greed reflect the soul questing for material possessions. Eyes of envy reflect the soul questing for prestige and popularity. But eyes of worship and prayer reflect the soul that is questing for and trusting in God.

**Psalm 143:8 - Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.**

### **AND OUR TRUST IN GOD IS DEMONSTRATED BY WORSHIP.**

The psalmist sang in v.1, “I lift my eyes to the one whose throne is in heaven.” God reigns and rules from the heavens. He rules from the highest position. A king is in his palace and the president is in the White House, but God is higher than them all in heaven. He is sovereign over everything and everyone. He is sovereign over ISIS. When He is ready to defeat them they will be defeated. He’s sovereign over every detail of your life. He is working out everything according to the purposes of His will. We have no higher appeal than to the administration and authority of God seated upon the throne of heaven.

When you’ve had enough, remind yourself of what is ultimately true about God and worship Him.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Now we have to be careful that we are viewing God properly. It’s like looking through the wrong end of some binoculars. If you look at God through the lens of your fears or troubles (or in the case of the psalm here, your adversaries) it makes God look smaller and far away. However, looking at Him through the lens of your faith and what the Bible tells us is true about God allows you to see Him larger and closer, seated on the throne of heaven.

### **OUR TRUST IN GOD IS ALSO DEMONSTRATED BY PRAYER.**

Prayer is simply looking to the Lord ... focusing our attention on Him and pouring out our mind and heart to Him with our words. And that’s what the psalmist does here in this psalm. His trust in God is demonstrated by His worship and prayer.

**James 5:13b - Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.**

When you think you’ve had enough don’t just sit there ... pray something ... look to the Lord ... lift your eyes to Him. Put your trust in...

## **1. THE LORD’S GUIDANCE**

**Psalm 123:2 - As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.**

Now in ancient times, a slave would stand quietly across the room, keeping a sharp eye on his master's hand. The master might never speak to his servant in public, but he would simply direct his servants with slight hand gestures. And off the slave would go to do whatever the master directed him to do.

When you've had enough look to the Lord for His guidance and direction. So often we try to lean on our own understanding. God's word is filled with promises that if His people will look to Him He will direct their path. Ask ... don't presume ... ask for His guidance to show you what to do.

When you think you've had enough, trust in ...

## **2. THE LORD'S SOLUTION**

**Psalm 123:2b - So our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.**

The psalmist knows God has a way to solve this problem. He is being taunted and ridiculed by an unnamed enemy. It would be easy to take matters into his own hands. Notice that the psalmist doesn't ask for God to destroy his enemies. In fact, He doesn't give God any instructions at all. He simply lays his situation before God and says, "Lord, have mercy." You never know what God is up to.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Recently I walked into a hospital room where a family was gathered around a loved one who was terribly ill. These were committed believers. It occurred to me as I observed this scene that God is working in countless ways through this man's illness. If it were up to me I might just instantly heal the man lying in the bed. But God is working in his life through the illness. Not only that, but God is working in his wife's life, and in the lives of his children and in the lives of the doctors and nurses who come in and out of the room through the day and see the faith of this family.

We may think we know the best way to solve our problems, but God alone knows best. Trust His solutions. We also trust in ...

## **3. THE LORD'S TIMING**

**Psalm 123:2b - So our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.**

"until..." – So there's a waiting time here. God's mercy is always there but we may not see it immediately. But we continue to look to Him *until* He does show it. God's timing is perfect. As

NT believers we know that as painful as our troubles may be, God is using it to shape us into the likeness of His Son. And that takes time.

**QUOTE:** In his commentary on this psalm Martin Luther wrote this: “For in that he defers his help, he does it not because he will not hear us, but to exercise and stir up our faith, and to teach us that the ways whereby he can and does deliver us are so manifold and miraculous that we are never able to conceive them. Therefore let us think that the thing which we ask is not *denied* but *deferred*, and assure ourselves that we are not neglected because of this delay.”

We may think we’ve had enough, but God really knows when we’ve had enough ... when His purposes are fully accomplished in our trials. Then, in His perfect timing, He will deliver us.

But we also trust...

#### **4. THE LORD’S COMPASSION**

This is the deepest cry of humble faith:

**Psalm 123:3-4 - Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt. We have endured much ridicule from the proud, much contempt from the arrogant.**

We’re not told what the circumstances are but he has endured some kind of abuse. When people despise us and treat us with disrespect our souls can become bitter. Contempt is like acid to our souls if we are careful. As the psalmist says here, “We have had more than enough.” Don’t let the bitterness build up, look to the Lord.

What a simple cry from the vantage of our weakness ... “Have mercy on us, O Lord. There’s nothing we can do. We feel trapped in these circumstances. This problem is too big for us. Lord, You handle it. Lord, have mercy.”

Notice he looks to “the LORD” There’s the covenant name of God once again. We saw it last week. This is the great I AM, who, out of compassion and mercy, covenants with His people to be there God.

**Lamentations 3:22-23 - Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

That is the heart of God. He shows mercy to those who are humble enough to admit their need and repent. He shows mercy to those who confess their weakness.

Notice that the psalmist doesn’t ask for justice. He simply asks for mercy. These enemies have abused him, but he’s not asking for justice. After all, who in their right mind would ever go to

God and say, “God, give me what I deserve”? We deserve far worse than we get. The only thing we can ask of God is mercy.

Now, why would the psalmist ask *God* for mercy? Isn't it the proud and arrogant who are abusing him? You would think that the psalmist would say to the scoffers, “I've had enough of your taunts; have mercy on me.” Why? It is because the psalmist knows that God has His throne in heaven; He's in control of these circumstances. God doesn't approve of this treatment or condone it, but He is working through it. In some way God is using it to perfect His child through discipline.

So we allow ourselves to be humbled and broken by the circumstances. That's one thing suffering does ... it makes us humble (or at least it should). And suffering should make us more merciful toward others who are suffering. You cannot control when others are proud and arrogant toward you. But never let your heart become proud or arrogant toward others. Remain humble before the Lord. And something else: You may be the answer to someone else's prayer for mercy. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Now I said last week that if we are careful we will catch sightings of Jesus in these Psalms of Ascent. What we know from our vantage point is that every longing of the psalmist's heart is met in Jesus. Listen to what the NT tells us to do:

**Hebrews 12:2 - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

When you think you've had enough, fix your eyes on Jesus. The mercy that we need and long for is embodied in Jesus. He endured the contempt and scorn of the Cross, not because He deserved it, but because that was the only way we could ever be forgiven and made new. God can show mercy to weak sinners without compromising His holiness because of the penalty that Jesus paid on the Cross. After His crucifixion Jesus was raised from the dead, and after that He ascended to the right hand of the throne of God. That's the exact same throne the psalmist had in mind when he said, “I lift my eyes to you ... to you whose throne is in heaven.” Today when you look to God you see the face of Jesus. He is a merciful Savior.

Fix your eyes, not on your sin and your shame, but on the One who died to take it all away. Lift your eyes, not on your troubles, but on the One who is mercifully working through your troubles to make you holy in every way.