

Selections from the Psalms | Joy • Lament • Jesus

05 Have Mercy, Enough is Enough!

July 9, 2017

INTRODUCTION

I don't know if any of you wear glasses, but I was very young when I got me first pair of glasses. Today I mostly wear contacts but I can remember the day my mom picked up my first pair of glasses from the eye doctor and brought them home. I ran outside to meet her with eager expectation because I was curious how much difference they would make. I grabbed them out of her hand and put them on quickly.

But before I go any farther let me take a few minutes to describe the chunkiness of what I put on my face. I am still not clear how something that large was allowed to be sold to a middle schooler who had to wear them in public and particularly in front of other middle schoolers.

Why do I ask that question? Well, for starters the frames were made of military grade plastic that I am sure was used on humvees and probably missiles. They could absolutely survive nuclear war, which was a necessity for me as I was a rambunctious little boy constantly busting my head against something.

Then the lenses!! Oh the lenses!! They were so thick my eyeballs became as big as hubcaps when someone had to look at me. On top of that I am so blind that the magnification on them was so great I could see through people. If anyone needed a magnifying glass they just used my glasses. If you needed to see into the future just use my glasses!

Though they were cumbersome, when I put them on *I could see*. When I put them on that day everything that once was blurry came into focus. The tree across the road in my neighbors yard was

beautiful rather than a green blob and for the first time I thought, “That is a good climbing tree”.

Focus had never been more desirable once I realized just how out of focus my vision had been. I lived so many days out of focus but now there was no way any amount of ridicule would remove those chunky military grade glasses from my face.

The Psalms seem to have this type effect on us. They focus us. They use beautiful imagery to bring our eyes back into focus. They instruct our eyes and tell them were to focus and as we focus and our vision becomes clear...and what we see is the Lord in all his wonder.

So this morning I am praying that God would through Psalm 123 focus our attention to the proper place, which is HIM. That Psalm 123 would be a pair of glasses to slide on our face when life is troublesome. It can be chunky and difficult to wear, but essential to seeing...

Hopefully you have been able to see up to this point that poetry is extremely helpful to cause us to imagine things as they should be and therefore expands our thinking. Poetry is defined as a literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas and Hebrew Poetry is no different.

Here in Psalms 123 we see two major focuses, eyes and mercy.¹ It is these two things that the Psalmist wants to make us feel and uses to direct our gaze upwards. But before we look at those two major focuses, we first need to start by noticing the superscript.

¹ I am most indebted to this book for the structure // Wilfred G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, (England: Sheffield Academic press, 1984), p 259, 366-68.

SUPERSCRIPT

A Song of Ascents (Psalms 120-134)... This Psalm was intended to be read either ascending the temple steps or on the journey towards Jerusalem. In either case there would be an ascent that would take place and this Psalm alongside several other Psalms was meant for worship; to be sung as they made their way towards the temple.

“This diverse group includes individual and corporate laments, songs of confidence, thanksgiving hymns, a song celebrating Zion, wisdom psalms, a royal psalm, and a psalm for a liturgical occasion.”²

But what is of most interest is part of the process to journey towards the temple was to lament... now this puts a lot of weight on practicing lament. The people of God repeatedly lamented as they approached the Temple.

There is value in lamenting. Lament is a fresh reminder, as we have seen, of our dependence on God and God’s promises to us. Voicing our problem reminds us of his promises. So it was a regular practice for them to sing this Psalm as they ascended towards the temple.

Lets look at our first observation...

EYES

First observation is the word *eye* is repeated four times in just two verses. This is the clear subject of the Psalm, the direction of our focus. A song of ascent for sure that starts with our eyes and where they are focused; where are they drawing strength that in turn

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1102.

strengthens the entire body? If someone is going to ascend they must first look up.

Look up to see where they are going and how to adjust their current position to reach their destination. The clear direction to which our eyes should be fixed is upwards towards the place our God dwells. He alone is the focus above all other things. We must look up, not physically, but above all other potential gods and see the great God enthroned in heaven. We don't simply look up to gather intel but to gather strength.

Not only is the word *eye* repeated but also it is used in a series of comparative statements that culminates in the last 2 lines of verse 2.

This technique sort of builds tension to draw the reader's attention to the final comparison line, "*so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.*" This statement was meant to land heavy and evoke *persistence*; we will not stop looking towards the LORD (YHWH) till he has mercy! Oh if we had this resolve!! Stop looking and focusing on other things look and set your gaze on the LORD. Then will we ascend over our trouble and under His arms.

Also notice the progression from male servants to a single maidservant. The Psalmist is being very strategic to make a wonderful point. Between gender and number they sit in stark contrast to indicate all in-between should set their eyes upon the Lord till he has mercy!!

Everybody should focus his or her attention towards the Lord. This not reserved only for the put together, for the elite, for the poor, for the rich, for the child or adult, but for all!! Not only should all look but just as the servant waits patiently for the master the people of God wait patiently for the Lord to be merciful. The

servant waits for the masters direction, where to move, what to do, how to respond to all situations.

So the people of God look towards Him for direction on what to do, how to respond, how to live, to get more practical...how to interact with the world around us when they mock a stance that is clear in scripture. When you make counter-culture decision on your money, when you give of yourself for others rather than only looking out for number one!

But what are they/we looking for, why all this emphasis to look up and focus our eyes

MERCY

Here we see another repetition of a term: *mercy*. In Hebrew the word mercy ends verse two and begins verse three. Starting with the end of verse two *mercy* makes up three of the next four words with Yahweh tucked in between.

This becomes the key feature of the poem and leads to the plea, *Have mercy upon us, YHWH, have mercy upon us*. This is certainly the climax of the poem, which stands alone and draws the eyes and heart to a satisfying and proper lament in trouble. Everything has been leading to this outburst of dependence for the Lord to have mercy.

With the repeated *more than enough* in 3 and 4, this indicates an extensive suffering has or is occurring and exhaustion is setting in upon them. Not only is *more than enough* repeated but *contempt* is as well which thoroughly influences the reader to feel their troubles.

They are suffering; perhaps their troubles could be the direct hostility of those watching them ascend to Jerusalem or ascend the

stairs of the temple. All we have are the last two lines to understand the source of their troubles, “the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.”

One commentator puts it this way, “**Those who are at ease** can refer to unfaithful Israelites who do not trouble themselves with piety, preferring to enjoy luxury instead, or it can apply to Gentiles indifferent to the true God. Likewise the **proud** are arrogant in their unbelief. At many times during the history of God’s people, they are under threat from those who hold power.”³

As they make their journey they are feeling heavy weights of ridicule, oppression, and feel helpless. *As you make your journey...*

Do you feel helpless?

Do you feel heavy troubles sitting on your heart?

Are the bills too much?

Is the food running out?

Is your adult son rejecting Christ?

Are you troubled by the arrogance of those who disregard God?

Do you see suffering and hurt?

Do you watch the coverage of ISIS beheading Christian brothers and sisters and hurt and long for mercy not only for yourself but for others?

What are they/we to make of these troubles? To:

Set our gaze on the LORD in order
to ascend over our trouble and under His’ arms

³ Crossway Bibles. *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

THEREFORE...

The trouble should not get all the attention, the Lord should.

We cry out to him for help, for mercy, for all things. We are not immune from troubles, but we have a satisfying balm for our wounds. Why should the trouble get all the attention!

The trouble might persist, but your focus must be more persistent. There is no guarantee that immediate relief will come, but mercy will come and has come ultimately in Jesus!! In Luke 1:54 Mary connects God's mercy with the birth of Jesus, that He has come in remembrance of God's mercy. Ephesians 2:4-5 Paul says, "But God, being rich in *mercy*, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." Mercy has come!! Mercy is realized in Jesus!! Believer rejoice, non-believer in faith and repentance receive God's mercy in Jesus!!

Lastly, **let this be our guide in times of trouble in order to ascend over them.** Believers should feel no hesitation to present their troubles to the Lord and cry for His help. Even specifically asking for God to stop those from whom our trouble originates.

In closing...

May Psalm 123 be a set of chunky military grade glasses so you see through the trouble and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and find mercy!