

# Rest for the Weary - *Psalm 123*

## Introduction

- Today we're taking another step on the journey we're taking through the Psalms of ascent, and the first three Psalms that we've looked at have sort of given us a birds eye view of our journey as a whole.
- Psalm 120 introduced us to the world that we're living in, Psalm 121 showed us where we find help on our journey, and last week Darryl took us through Psalm 122 looking at our destination; where this whole journey is leading.
- And now this week we're going to look at Psalm 123 which steps back into talking a bit more about what life looks like for us on this journey. I'm glad that I actually get to speak to you over the next few weeks covering Psalm 123-125, because just like the first three, these Psalms form their own little unit, with a common theme we're going to see develop over the next few weeks.
- Alec Motyer in his commentary points out that the Psalms of Ascent are split into 5 different groups of 3.
- But as we get started into this Psalm, can we all agree that 2020, and now 2021 has just been an exhausting year. There has been so much going on, and I don't know about you, but I am just tired. Do you ever have those days where you look at the world, and you just feel so deflated? Weary and tired?
- I'm tired of reading a bunch of angry facebook posts, and people tearing each other apart in the comment sections. I am tired of listening to the news and hearing about all of the deaths that are happening each day, and I am tired of the seemingly constant heartbreaking revelations that we are hearing about these days. We talked a few weeks back about the 215 children found buried at one of the residential schools, and since then there have been more similar sites found, with one this week revealing 751 unmarked graves. My heart breaks at these revelations and the state of our world right now, and those are just some of the examples.
- I'm just so tired of the brokenness of this world, I want it to end. Elaine and I were taking a walk this week and just remarking that it all just feels so heavy, and we're tired of feeling that weight. Sometimes, this journey is hard. Life is hard, and we get so worn down by the brokenness that we see around us, and all we want is a break. And I'm sure each of us can relate to that feeling for one reason or another, we all have times where we just feel tired.
- But as I read through Psalm 123, I think that this is a passage that speaks so perfectly to the fatigue that we're all wrestling with right now, and that sense of weariness. It's as if this Psalm was written specifically with 2021 in mind.
- Specifically when I read V. 3 and I see the Psalmist crying to God for mercy saying "*We have had more than enough of contempt*", it really hits home, and I think those words are right in line with what most of us are feeling these days. We are tired, and we have had enough.

- This is a short Psalm, only 4 verses, but they are such rich verses, that can give us so much comfort in the midst of the Psalm 120 world that we're living in. It may not seem at face value to be the most uplifting of Psalms, but what it shows us is where we can find rest in those moments when this journey that we're on feels so exhausting and our hearts are so weary. And that is such a powerful message for us today.

## **The one who is enthroned in Heaven - V. 1-2**

- The Psalm begins in a very similar way to the beginning of Psalm 121 with the Psalmist lifting up their eyes, but this time there is no question of where our help comes from. This Psalm begins with us straight away lifting up our eyes to God.
- We've already seen that God is our source of help, so right away we're lifting our eyes to him.

*"To you I lift up my eyes,*

*O you who are enthroned in the heavens!" - Psalm 123:1 (ESV)*

- God is described as the one who is enthroned in the heavens. He is the one who is over all of Creation, and holds everything in his hands. Again, this is similar to what was seen in Psalm 121, in which God was described as the maker of Heaven and Earth. The Psalm begins by reminding us once again of who God is. Sort of re-orienting our focus in the midst of our exhaustion, and pointing us back to God. He is the Lord of this world, and he is in control of everything that happens in it.
- And as the Psalm continues into V. 2 we begin to see a description of who we are in relation to the God who is 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." - Psalm 123:2 (ESV)*

- We are described as relating to God here in a way similar to how a servant would relate to their master or mistress, and I think sometimes we can struggle with that notion. The idea that we're not actually the one on top, and we're not the ones in control in this world.

- We like to think that we are the ones who are in control of our own lives. We are the “captains of our destiny” so to speak, and God is there in the background in order to make sure our lives go the way that we think they should. When things start going wrong, God is there to correct them for us.
- We get in this mind set that God works for us and that the best way for us to have rest or peace in this world is for us to have everything under control, and for God to make sure that happens for us.
- That is **NOT** true.
- In the midst of trouble, we look up to God who is enthroned in heaven, as a servant would look to their master, and we cry out to him for mercy. That is how we relate to God and in order to truly find rest on our journey we need to be reminded of this. Of who God is, and who we are in relation to him.
- We are not the ones who are enthroned in the heavens, and we are not the ones in control of everything happening around us. And it’s not our responsibility to fix this world.
- And it’s easy to think that this whole concept of servant and master has some negative implications. We don’t want to see ourselves as servants, and we usually think of a “master” as someone who is harsh, and cruel and uncaring towards their servants. But in reality, God is not some harsh or abusive master, but a truly loving one, and we can find rest knowing that he is enthroned in heaven, above this broken world, and we serve him. We serve the one who is greater than all the brokenness we see around us.
- And to live that out, to follow the example that is given to us in this Psalm, to adopt this posture of looking up to God as our master, requires a lot of humility. It goes against our pride. It goes against our desire for control, but it is so so important for us to remember that we serve God, not the other way around.
- Because wherever you and I try to be our own masters, things will always go terribly wrong. It’s exactly this attitude that led to the fall in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve decided that they didn’t want to have God as their master, they wanted to be on his level, they wanted to be like God. And as a result, they disobeyed him, and sin entered into the world, leading to the many different struggles that we face today.
- When I think about this idea of us as God’s servants, and him as our master, I’m reminded of something Paul says in Romans 6:20-23

*“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Rom. 6:20-23 (ESV)*

- We will always serve something or someone. Either we will live as a servant to God, or we will live as a servant to sin, and all of us at one point were in that place of being a slave to sin.
- But because of the amazing love of God, he sent his son to die on the cross to pay the wages for our sin, so that we did not have to live as servants to sin any more, but can now live as servants to God. The ability to look up to God as a servant looks to his master is such a gift that is only made available to us through the love of Christ and his amazing sacrifice.
- And the verse ends with these words, that we are looking to our God until he has mercy on us. In our distress and our exhaustion, we look to God, and we wait on his timing for the relief that he gives in the midst of struggling, and we can truly have rest knowing that he is the one who is enthroned in heaven, and we serve him.

### **The scorn of the world - V. 3-4**

- So V. 2 ends with this statement of waiting on God for mercy, and as we move into V. 3-4 we see what it is that the Psalmist is crying for mercy from.

*“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.” - Psalm 123:3-4 (ESV)*

- There is such a sense of exhaustion in these two verses that I think we can all relate to.
- You get the sense here that the Psalmist crying out here has been facing this struggle for some time and has come to the end of their rope.
- *“We have had more than enough”*
- As the verses continue, the Psalmist explains what exactly he has had “more than enough” of.
- The two main words that are used are contempt and scorn.
- Essentially, what he’s had enough of, is the rejection of the world around him. Those who look down on him, and on the rest of God’s people.
- We have had enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, and the contempt of the proud. We have had enough of this rejection.
- You get the sense that nearly every day the Psalmist is encountering this scorn and contempt. It’s everywhere and it’s overwhelming, pushing him to the point of crying out “I’ve had more than enough!”. He has had a hard journey and he is tired.

- This contempt and scorn is coming from those who are living opposite to the posture presented in the first two verses. Rather than living with God as their master, they have made themselves their masters. They are those who are proud. Those who are at ease.
- They like life the way it is, they like living for themselves, so they reject those who say there is an issue in this world that only God can fix.
- So we're trying to make our way in this broken, Psalm 120 world, trying to make sense of all the brokenness that we see, and at the same time we're having to face the scorn, and contempt, and rejection of the world around us. It's just weight upon weight and it's exhausting. There are days where it seems so hard to bear. Days when we feel the full force of the reality that this world is not our home and we do not belong here.
- And I don't know if you've ever felt that, but it's difficult to be rejected by those around us. Whether it's happening in a friend group, a work setting, even within family. It's so hard to feel the rejection of those around us. To feel that scorn and contempt aimed at us.
- Even if it's not specifically aimed at us, but we see it happening so often in the world around us and it is just so tiring.
- Spurgeon writes:
  - *"Great hearts have been broken and brave spirits have withered under falsehood and contempt."*
- Those words are pretty intense. This is not a light subject, but then he writes this:
  - *"For comfort, we should remember that they also "despised and rejected" our divine Lord."*
- He refers to Isaiah 53:3 here, to say that when you're facing that scorn, and that contempt from the world around you, remember that you are not alone. Remember that Jesus was also rejected by the world.

*He was despised and rejected by men,  
 a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
 and as one from whom men hide their faces  
 he was despised, and we esteemed him not. - Isaiah 53:3 (ESV)*

- If you remember back a few months ago, Darryl spoke a message out of the book of John, talking about the humanity of Christ, and how Jesus being born fully human on earth, and

living among us enabled him to perfectly sympathize with every struggle that we face in this world.

- The world that Jesus came to was a Psalm 120 world, and it was in the midst of that that he was put to death.
- So when you are facing the contempt and scorn of the world, and when you are confronted with all of the brokenness that you see filling our world, and you just feel like you're at the end of your rope, find rest in the fact that Jesus knows and intimately understands every struggle that you're facing.
- Find rest in the knowledge of Christ and the relationship you have with him. On the days when you feel that rejection of the world, and you just feel like you don't belong here, remember that this world, really is not your home. Because of what Christ has done, your home is in eternal life with him.

## **Conclusion**

- Now as we come to the end, this Psalm actually leaves us with a bit of an incomplete feeling. There is this cry for mercy and relief, and then it just... ends. Our soul has had enough of scorn and contempt, and then the Psalm ends.
- It isn't giving us a real conclusion in the way that we would expect. It's not giving us a "3 step plan for a better life". It doesn't end with saying that God fixed everything and the contempt and scorn that the Psalmist was facing just went away, or even a promise that that will happen. It also doesn't end with the Psalmist calling for justice against those who've treated him with such scorn and contempt.
- And you would expect that. You would expect that after this cry for mercy there would be some sort of statement of assurance that mercy will come, and there will be an end to the struggles that the Psalmist is facing. But it's not there.
- And it's not there because a conclusion isn't really what this Psalm is all about.
- Next week we're going to look at a Psalm that shows how God is our victory in times of trouble, but this Psalm is not about finding resolution to the things that we are struggling with in this world.
- This Psalm is about showing us where we can find rest in the midst of those struggles, and that our rest is not found in the end of our struggles, or even the assurance that our struggles will end in this world. Our rest is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- That Christ can sympathize with all of the scorn and contempt that we face in this world on his behalf

- And that through his sacrifice on the cross, we have the chance to look up to the one who is enthroned in Heaven, as a servant looks to a master, and cry out to him for mercy.
- And make no mistake, for those of us who follow Christ, there will be a day when all of the brokenness, when all of the scorn and contempt of this world will be finished. When Christ will return and we will enjoy eternal life with him in the new heavens and the new earth and we will have full relief from all of the brokenness that we see in this world. That is our eternal hope in the Gospel.
- And even if we never see an end to these struggles in this world we know that there is resolution, and an end to our struggles beyond this world in Christ, and so we put our trust in him, and we lean on him for rest in the midst of the brokenness that we face while we live in this world. Crying to God for mercy, and resting in the hope of the Gospel.
- So as I end, I want to leave you with this, and I want you to remember it. In an exhausting world, full of scorn and contempt, we can find rest in the Gospel, and the amazing love that has been shown to us by Christ.