

Psalm 123 | “Mercy Flows Down”

Preached on December 1, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 123 today. *[pauseeee]*

When someone is learning something new, they must start by learning the basic, foundational things. *[pause]*

Before a child knows how to read, he or she must learn the ABC's. *[pause]*

Before becoming an electrician, a person must learn what electricity is.

And before learning a sport, you must learn the fundamentals. *[pause]*

Well here in this psalm, it's like the psalmist is at the temple, and his prayerful song demonstrates a heartfelt expression of simple faith. *[pauseeee]*

He's not like Paul, expounding upon some deep, complex theological truth, but he shows a basic, fundamental aspect of faith: faith looks to the Lord for mercy. *[pauseeee]*

In order to grow, learn, and mature in the faith, you must understand that foundational thing—you are a person in need of the mercy of God.

You miss that foundation block, and you are already off track. *[pause]*

You don't understand that truth, and your view of yourself and your view of God will both be wrong. *[pauseeee]*

So when you think of yourself, do you ever think of yourself in this way? *[pause]*

Do you think, “I am a person in need of mercy”? *[pauseeee]*

I'm not talking about *just* when you do some big, clearly obvious sin, but I'm talking about in general, on an everyday basis. *[pauseee]*

Don't think of some other person, think of yourself alone: do you need the mercy of God?

Well the psalmist definitely sees this about himself, and his psalm is a part of one of the “songs of ascents” in the psalter. *[pause]*

These songs were sung as the people “ascended” to the temple together, and so far we have seen a progression being made. *[pause]*

In Psalm 120, the psalmist was in a far away, foreign land and longing to be in Jerusalem. *[pause]*

The next psalm showed him traveling on his way there. *[pause]*

Psalm 122 then showed him arriving in the gates of Jerusalem, and now Psalm 123 is like the psalmist beginning to worship God directly. *[pause]*

An indication of this is the fact that in the 3 prior psalms the psalmist talked *about* the Lord, but now the psalmist talks *to* the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

This is also a community psalm as ‘we’, ‘us’, and ‘our’ is used throughout.

And I was thinking that since this psalm was intended to be read and sung as a community, then this morning, I would like you to read this psalm out loud with me. *[pause]*

The words will be on the screen—let’s READ it together out loud. *[READ]*

This psalm shows us two main things, and the first is...

I. We are to lift our eyes to the Lord.

Without contacts or glasses, I cannot see well. *[pause]*

My blurry eyesight was discovered when I was younger, and so the eye doctor said that I needed to wear glasses. *[pause]*

Now as a kid, this was not good news—no one *wants* to hear that they now have to wear glasses all the time. *[pause]*

But although wearing glasses was not something that I desired—I did desire *to see*, so wearing glasses was something that I needed to do in order to see around me. *[pauseeee]*

Looking and seeing helps us to perceive what’s going on around us, and our eyes see a lot of things in life...

We look around us and see a broken world—we see the anger, discord, and hurt. *[pause]*

We look at ourselves and see our weaknesses, struggles, and failings. *[pause]*

We look at others, who sometimes disappoint us. *[pause]*

When we see these problems and this brokenness in life, we look for solutions, don’t we? *[pause]*

We look for any kind of answer that may solve what ails us and what ails the world.

And it’s amidst all of that looking at what’s going on around us that the psalmist points us to look in the direction of the true answer—up to the Lord. *[pause]*

He speaks directly to God and says in verse 1, “To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!” *[pauseeee]*

To lift up your eyes to the Lord shows a certain humility and dependence.

It means that I must look away from myself, and onto Him. *[pauseeee]*

I, who am down here and low, must look up to Him, who is up there and high.

That takes a humble dependence to admit not only that I am low, but that I don't have the solution. *[pauseeee]*

We are not quick to be humble or even dependent—we naturally slide towards prideful self-reliance. *[pause]*

What do kids normally say to their mom or dad? "I do it!" *[pause]*

We want the glory and the credit for the things we have done, so we try, try, and try to do things ourselves.

But sadly, this seeps over into how we live out our faith. *[pauseeee]*

Good works? We just try to muster up the strength and ability. *[pause]*

Joy, peace, and contentment? We roll up our sleeves to attempt to gain them. *[pause]*

Seeing another person saved or changing our kids?

We think that if we just do the right methods and try hard enough, then we can do it.

And what happens is that we may come to the gathering of the church with our eyes lifted up, but then once we make it out of the doors, our eyes are back down again. *[pauseeee]*

So we see that in order to lift up our eyes, we must have a correct view of ourselves—as needy and dependent.

But if that's all that there is, you will only look down in despair because you have no hope. *[pause]*

So the second part of lifting up your eyes is that you must have a correct view of God. *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist says that the Lord is the one who is "enthroned in heavens". *[pause]*

The idea is that God dwells and sits in the heavens—it is where He resides. *[pause]*

It's there that He sits enthroned over all because He is the highest authority.

He is the King in charge, and who has all control, and He isn't affected by the situations of this life, like we are...

That's the One we look to. *[pauseeee]*

God is the High up, Sovereign One—there’s no one *better* to look to!

Shouldn’t that give you utmost confidence? *[pause]*

To know that we look to the one enthroned in the heavens should calm our fears and comfort our souls. *[pause]*

To look to some random person off the street wouldn’t give you confidence.

To look to just another human may help in some regards, but they can’t help you with anything and everything you need...

No, we must lift our eyes to the one enthroned above. *[pause]*

He has all the power, all the authority, all the dominion, and all the control and sovereignty, so will you look to Him? *[pauseeee]*

Now to do this—to truly lift our eyes to the Lord means that we will need to exercise faith.

And this is because lifting up your eyes is an act of faith. *[pauseeee]*

You see, we are not called to “blind faith”, we are called to “eyes-lifted-up faith”. *[pause]*

Our faith is not blind, it is actually directed to the heavens. *[pause]*

We don’t cover our eyes and hope for the best, we lift our eyes and trust in the best. *[pauseeee]*

Lifting our eyes means we are people who live with faith-filled expectation that God will work, that God will provide, and that God will be all that we need. *[pauseeee]*

Lifting our eyes is looking and seeing that the Lord is the answer. *[pauseeee]*

The big thing nowadays is to look to psychology for the answers to what ails us, but I’m not going to look there.

I’m going to look where the Word of God tells me to look—to the Lord—and may my mind, heart, and actions always proclaim the truth that He is sufficient! *[pauseeee]*

What’s amazing is that this one “enthroned in the heavens” desires for us to look to Him. *[pause]*

He is both high up and present; exalted and willing to care.

No wonder Jesus taught us to pray, “our Father in heaven.”¹ *[pauseeee]*

It’s that love and care that the psalmist talks about next...

¹ Matthew 6:9.

Verse 2 says, “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.” *[pauseeee]*

Preachers give a lot of illustrations to help convey a point to their listeners. *[pause]*

Well guess what?

The psalmist here likewise gives us an illustration that helps us to see what he means. *[pause]*

He just talked about how he lifts his eyes to the Lord, and now he will illustrate what it looks like to do so...

It looks like a servant looking to the hand of their master, or like a female servant looking to the hand of their female master. *[pauseeee]*

Now we don’t have servants and masters in our time, so we need to jump into our time machine and return our minds back to that time. *[pauseeee]*

Obviously, a servant was called to obey and do everything that their master told them to do. *[pause]*

In that way, they looked to the hand of their master for orders and directions, but that’s not the aspect of servanthood that the psalmist seems to be talking about. *[pause]*

The aspect that he’s talking about is a looking to the master *for mercy* because the psalmist concludes the illustration by saying, “so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.” *[pauseeee]*

So the servant looked to the master for mercy.

That is, a slave was submissive, yes, but he or she was also needy and dependent on the master, who had the power and control to provide for them. *[pauseeee]*

As they served the master, so also, they looked to the hand of the master to provide provision, protection, and relief.

So to look to the hand of your master was to wait and hope in the power of your master to dispense kindness and grace to you. *[pause]*

His hand had the power to dispense mercy, so the servant looked to him to step up, act, and intervene on his behalf...

Likewise, the Lord is our Master, and we are His servants. *[pauseeee]*

Do you view yourself as a servant of the Master? *[pause]*

Too often people think that they are over God, and so can tell Him what to do. *[pause]*

They would never say that outright, but they sure do live and act like God is there to do *their* bidding.

But no—we don't boss Him around or tell Him what to do and when—we are the ones dependent on His mercy! *[pauseeee]*

If it wasn't for the mercy of God, we wouldn't be here at all.

So remember that you are the servant, and God is the Master, but then remember that He is merciful! *[pause]*

Look to His hand! *[pause]*

Look to His merciful hand, waiting on His action and power.

Look for any movement of His hand to dispense gracious kindness to you. *[pause]*

Look, look, look to Him!

Look until you receive mercy! *[pause]*

Don't give up!

Look intently, waiting for His hand to move.

Don't become impatient, but look with faith! *[pause]*

Keep praying, keep knocking, keep looking for merciful movements of His hand! *[pauseeeee]*

When you are facing hardship, experiencing pain, yet clinging in faith to the Lord, people may ask you how you are doing or even maybe what you are doing...

Well you can respond with, "I'm looking to the Lord's hand til He has mercy upon me." *[pauseeeee]*

But with that, we must understand that His mercy sometimes looks like peace amidst the storm, and not an immediate dispersing of the storm. *[pause]*

Sometimes His mercy looks like strength or comfort in the trial, and not the trial's instant removal. *[pause]*

Sometimes in mercy He says, "OK now." *[pause]*

Other times He says, "Just wait, it's coming," and still other times in mercy He says, "I've got something better for you." *[pause]*

And the truth is that as Christ-followers we will someday receive the mercy of life everlasting with Him in glorified bodies.

So when you look to the Lord in faith, the Lord’s mercy is never an “if” in your life, but it’s always a matter of when.

Therefore, look up in faith to your mighty and merciful Master, who sits enthroned in the heavens—watch His hand. *[pause]*

Look until mercy flows down. *[pauseeeee]*

If you were standing on a hill, and you wanted to find the source of a stream of water, which way would you look? *[pause]*

Would you walk *down* the hill to find its source?

Of course not, because if you know anything about physics, it’s that water always runs down—it goes with the flow of gravity. *[pause]*

Therefore, to find the source of the stream of water, you would have to look up the hill. *[pause]*

So also, to find mercy you must look up, and this is because mercy flows *down*. *[pause]*

It comes down to us from the Heavenly Father, flowing from His “throne of grace”.²

So as Hebrews says, “let us then with confidence draw near”, for it’s that throne of grace, where we find “help in time of need”. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s raise our eyes up in prayer, and watch the mercy come down. *[pauseeee]*

It’s mercy that the psalm expands upon further in verses 3–4, and it shows us that...

II. We need mercy from the Lord.

What do you think you need? *[pause]*

I’m sure each of us has a long list of needs, for we need food, clothing, and shelter. *[pause]*

We need money to pay the bills, and health to function well. *[pause]*

On top of that, we need at least a little bit of knowledge in this life, so that we can accomplish tasks, and we need wisdom to know how to apply that knowledge. *[pause]*

Of course, we need strength in order to do some daily tasks, and sanity to keep it all together.

But there’s something missing from what I just listed—we also need God’s mercy. *[pauseeee]*

How many of us would list mercy on our “needs list”, if we had to make one? *[pause]*

We don’t often view mercy as a need, yet it is!

² A reference to Hebrews 4:16.

We need mercy from the Lord, the psalmist makes that extra clear here in this psalm. *[pauseeee]*

It's mercy that is actually the main point of the psalm...

In verses 1–2, he looks to the Lord until the Lord will have mercy, and then in verses 3–4, he asks for mercy because of the contempt of others. *[pause]*

Mercy is in the center of the psalm and is the central point of the psalm. [pauseeee]

There in verse 3, he says, “Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us.”

So the psalmist is desperate for mercy. [pause]

His situation has led him to the point of hopelessness without the Lord’s intervention, for he knew that the Lord was his only hope. *[pauseeee]*

We saw that earlier that he looked to the Lord until He showed mercy.

And here again is that cry of desperation and absolute need. *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever felt that way?...

Have you ever felt hopeless, unless God worked? *[pause]*

You were at the end of your rope, no other solutions were possible, and only God could step in the gap.

That’s how the psalmist felt. *[pauseeee]*

Not only does the psalm writer feel this way himself, but he writes, “Have mercy on us.” [pause]

This is a group psalm, and the way it’s said, it’s really also a corporate prayer. *[pause]*

We, as the people of God, should together feel our need for the Lord’s mercy...

We should cry this out together at times through songs and prayers, expressing our desire for His mercy. *[pause]*

This is why we sing songs that say, “Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!”³ and we sing, “Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.”⁴ [pauseeee]

But we should pray this way, too...

We should pray in absolute need of the mercy of God, and His mercy should be one of the top things on our “needs list” as we go to Him in prayer. [pauseeee]

³ “Amazing Grace” by John Newton.

⁴ “His Mercy is More” by Matt Boswell & Matt Papa.

How many times do we corporately pray, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us”?

Does that reveal that we don’t truly see our desperate need for His mercy? *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist’s desperate plea for mercy is also seen in how he *repeats* the request. *[pause]*

If someone kept saying to you, “Please, please, please,” you’d get the idea that they were desperately pleading for something. *[pause]*

You understand that they are in a situation of need—well that’s what the psalmist does. *[pauseeee]*

This is also a very *simple* request. *[pause]*

The writer isn’t making some complex, detailed ask.

He’s simply asking for mercy, and we need to remember that we can go to God with simple requests. *[pause]*

He doesn’t expect your requests to always be laid out in all of their intricate details, but He loves even a simple, “Lord, have mercy on me!” *[pause]*

That’s how the two blind men in Matthew 20 addressed Jesus, when they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us!”⁵ *[pauseee]*

God wants you to express your need for His mercy, and you don’t have to write up a dissertation as to why you need it from Him. *[pauseeeee]*

Now why is it that this group of people in the psalm desired mercy? *[pause]*

I’m sure at other times, they could mention other subjects and situations, but in this one, the psalmist says that they need mercy because they were experiencing *contempt from others*. *[pause]*

He says, “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.” *[pauseeee]*

To face contempt and scorn is to face disdain, ridicule, and derision. *[pause]*

When someone has contempt for someone else, it’s like they can’t stand the other person.

It’s like they consider them worthless, despicable, and beneath them. *[pauseeee]*

While we do not know exactly the scorn that God’s people in this psalm faced, we do know what kind of mocking believers face in general, and we do know what kinds of mocking that we face now. *[pauseeee]*

⁵ Matthew 20:30–31.

Typically, God’s followers face mocking over their beliefs. *[pause]*

Some say, “There is no God,”⁶ and deride us for believing in what they call an imaginary god. *[pause]*

Others ridicule us because they view us as using our faith simply as a crutch. *[pause]*

Also, our view of Jesus as the only way to eternal life is looked down with contempt in our pluralistic world. *[pause]*

Our views of marriage, parenting, gender roles, and sexuality are all seen as mean, hateful, and outdated. *[pauseeee]*

God’s followers are also mocked for their lifestyle. *[pause]*

We are scorned because we don’t join in the gossip or talk like them. *[pause]*

Sometimes the way that we dress can be ridiculed, if we desire to dress modestly. *[pause]*

The way that we prioritize our time by choosing to go to church, and serving in various church activities can be scorned, too. *[pause]*

Also, if we don’t participate with them in something that we view as wrong, we can be seen as too uptight, or “holier-than-thou”. *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist explains that this contempt and scorn comes from the prideful and those at ease. *[pause]*

It’s usually the arrogant, who ridicule Christians because they pridefully think that they don’t need God. *[pause]*

They also boast highly about their greatness, and so look down upon others who they deem as “below them”. *[pauseeee]*

Now we can easily understand who the prideful are, but who are “those at ease”? *[pause]*

“Those at ease” are the carefree wicked ones of the world. *[pause]*

There are some evil people, who seem to have it so good, and who seem to have very little problems in life.

And looking at their lives, we can question, “How do they have it so good when they are so evil?” *[pause]*

It’s those kinds of people that often scorn Christians. *[pauseeee]*

⁶ A reference to Psalm 14:1.

Now this contempt, scorn, and ridicule can really get to us, can't it? *[pause]*

No one *enjoys* being scorned regularly.

No one likes to be disrespected and thought of as lowly in other people's eyes.

And this psalm actually shows us the reality of what we *feel* when we are continually exposed to ridicule for our faith. *[pauseeee]*

Experiencing the emotional weight of this ridicule, the psalmist calls out to the Lord for mercy, and he says, "we have had more than enough of contempt"! *[pauseeee]*

It's like he's saying, "We have had our fill! We can't take it anymore!" *[pauseeee]*

The community of faith was tired of the scorn and contempt because it *does hurt*. *[pause]*

The Bible shows us reality—it doesn't just act like life isn't hard.

It doesn't present some idealistic vision of the Christian life, where we just never feel anything, even when it's hard. *[pause]*

No, we feel it.

The psalmist and his community *felt it*. *[pause]*

They felt the piercing pain of contempt, and the acute hurt of scorn.

He even mentions that "our *soul* has had more than enough." *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever felt ridicule down deep within you? *[pause]*

That's what they felt—the pain had gone down to even the point that their *souls* couldn't take it anymore. *[pauseeee]*

So yes, we feel the affliction of contempt, but the key is how we respond to it. *[pause]*

Are we supposed to retaliate with contempt and scorn them in return? *[pause]*

Are we supposed to hurl insults, and strike back in aggressiveness?

Is that the right way? *[pause]*

What about the other extreme—are we supposed to just do nothing? *[pause]*

Let me tell you this, you are not supposed to just do nothing when you face ridicule and scorn. *[pauseeee]*

Now that may be shocking to you, but hear me out...

Does the psalmist do nothing, like *absolutely nothing*, when he experiences contempt? *[pause]*

Nope!

You are not supposed to do nothing when you go through contempt for your faith, instead, you are supposed to take it to the Lord! *[pause]*

That's something, isn't it?

The psalmist took it all to the Lord! *[pause]*

We don't retaliate, nor do we sit back and do nothing—we lift it to the Lord.

We cry out to the Lord, sharing with Him our thoughts and feelings.

We lament! *[pause]*

We say, “Lord, I can't take this anymore! I've had my fill!” *[pause]*

We say, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us!” *[pause]*

We take all of our pain, our emotions, our anger, our grief, our hurt and lift up to the Lord, and say, “Lord, have mercy.” *[pauseeee]*

So while the scorners looked down upon the people of God, what did the people of God do?

They looked higher than their enemies. *[pause]*

They looked up above them to the one enthroned in the heavens,⁷ and placed their hope there. *[pauseeeee]*

Our hope is not in the thoughts of others about us—their view of us and their response to us is not what truly matters...

Our hope is in what God thinks of us, and His response. *[pauseee]*

For those who have trusted in Jesus Christ, He sees us as beloved children, and someday He will make all things right.

So we take it all to the Lord. *[pauseeeee]*

Have you been facing some contempt and scorn from others due to your faith? *[pause]*

I know it's painful and it hurts—the psalmist felt it, too, but take it to the one enthroned on high.

He cares, and He's in control. *[pause]*

⁷ I was helped to see this insight by: R. E. O. White, “Psalms,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, *Baker Reference Library* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 394.

He has all power, and will bring ultimate justice, so entrust it to Him. *[pauseee]*

You will feel His merciful hand, as He comforts you in your affliction. *[pause]*

You will know His ever-flowing mercy, as He gives you a steadfast peace amidst the hurling scorn.

And you will experience His future mercy when He makes all things right someday. *[pauseee]*

Look to the Lord for mercy!

There are a lot of things that we need in this life, but one of the biggest is the mercy of God. *[pause]*

We look around us, and we see brokenness beyond belief. *[pause]*

We look around us, and the world doesn't provide the ultimate answers for life. *[pause]*

We look around us, and experience contempt and scorn from others sometimes.

So what we must do is look up. *[pause]*

Lift up your eyes to the Lord, trust Him.

He is good, and kind, and merciful. *[pauseeee]*

What's truly amazing is that this one "enthroned in the heavens" reaches down in love and mercy towards us. *[pause]*

He has reached down in mercy by sending His only Son, Jesus, to come to this sinful, broken, merciless world to be its Savior...

And to save sinners like us, who didn't deserve mercy! *[pauseee]*

He experienced contempt and scorn from the prideful. *[pause]*

He faced more than enough of it—way more than any of us could take.

Yet He willingly went to the cross, died in our place for our sins, and then rose again...

Now that's mercy. *[pauseee]*

By simple faith in Jesus Christ, whereby we acknowledge our sinfulness and cry out for grace by saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord. I'm a great sinner, but I trust that Jesus died for me!"...

It's by that simple act of faith of looking up to Christ that mercy flows down to us from the cross. *[pauseee]*

Now, since being saved through Jesus Christ, our lives are stamped with the words: “I FOUND MERCY.” *[pause]*

I have found mercy in the past through forgiveness and eternal life. *[pause]*

I find mercy now, as I draw near in confidence to receive it in time of need.⁸

And I will find mercy someday when Christ comes to save, judge, rule, and reign. *[pauseeee]*

The one enthroned in the heavens has a never-ending supply of mercy that is ready to flow down to you, but will you lift up your eyes in faith?

⁸ An allusion to Hebrews 4:16.