

PSALMS

Chapter 123

Our Eyes Look to the LORD Our God

A Song of Ascents.

To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! 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. 3 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. 4 Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

Ps 123 A prayer of God's humble people for him to show mercy and so foil the contempt of the proud. As to its structure, a one-verse introduction is followed by two couplets, each developing its own theme. (CSB)

Lacks the travel imagery of Ps 121–22. Could describe pilgrims who act as servants, following God's direction to appear annually before Him. During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, refugees returning to Jerusalem were esp mocked for their hope in the Lord and His plans (Ne 2:10, 19; 4:1–4). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, looking to God; vv 3–4, appeal for mercy. (TLSB)

The 123rd psalm is a psalm of prayer against the arrogant and the proud who despise and scorn God's Word and his little ones. Not only the nations considered the God and the worship of the children of Israel to be a work of foolishness, yes, even error and sedition. Even among the Israelites themselves, the worshipers of idols and false gods, the false teachers with their multitudes, also arrogantly and securely despised and scorned the little land and the true teaching, as Psalm 12 and Psalm 14 above also lament.

So also today, our princes and rebellious spirits (who are "as holy as the Gospel itself") in an entirely princely and pious manner despise the poor preacher and the faithful worshiper of Christ and tread them underfoot—say nothing of what our heathen, the spiritual lords, do, as well as their multitudes. We therefore are covered everywhere with contempt. But God is and will be gracious. Amen (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

In this psalm the psalmist's eye rise from Jerusalem to the Lord who is enthroned in heaven. Notice the rising pattern in the words "eyes" and "mercy." (PBC)

123:1 *I lift up my eyes.* This is a physical act that focuses on the spiritual direction of the prayer. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

who are enthroned is in the heavens. The same God whose earthly throne is in the temple on Mount Zion. (CSB)

OT believers recognized that the hills were not their security and that Jerusalem itself was not their greatest joy. They looked to the Lord as their source of joy and as their fortress. (PBC)

123:2 *servants... maidservants.* Similes by which the faithful (men and women alike) present themselves as humbly dependent on God. (CSB)

Servants watch their master's hand both for the good that comes and for the direction that puts them into action. (TLSB)

eye...God – We watch God's hand for His good and direction (Ezr 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). (TLSB)

As slaves depend on their master for everything, so believers depend on the Lord for everything. (PBC)

has mercy upon us – Believers trust that God's mercy will come in its time, sent from His timeless grace. Cf Lk 18:1–8. (TLSB)

123:3 *have had more than enough of contempt* – The Jew's religious practices, which set them apart from the Gentile world, did not win them much favor in the ancient world. On the contrary, pagans heaped ridicule upon them. Today things are no different for Christians who take God at his word. (PBC)

Tired, the psalmist looks for his Master to protect him. He is an attentive servant, but others mock him for his devotion to God. (TLSB)

123:4 *scorn...contempt of the proud.* Those who live by their own wits and strength pour contempt on those who humbly rely on God, especially when those who rely on God suffer or do not prosper. (CSB)

The word "scorn" has the meaning of "scoffing, mocking, scorning, deriding, laughing at" (see Psalm 2:4). So this brief lament (and motivation for God to be merciful) is that the people had all the ridicule they could take. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

Ps 123 Our eyes are to be upon God, both to receive His blessings and to do His bidding. We are servants of a merciful Lord. However, when our time of service is filled with contempt from others, we grow tired of waiting for God's justice. The Lord does indeed have mercy for us in Christ Jesus. • I do not despair, O Lord, but pray to the One who sees my service and my enemies. May Your reward and Your justice come. Amen. (TLSB)