Acts 2:22-36

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Preacher: Arthur Jackson

[0:00] Song of Ascents. To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid servant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.

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.
This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good afternoon to you.
It's good to be in the house of God with you, and we look forward to hearing what the Lord has to say to us through this marvelous passage of Scripture on this afternoon.
Would you bow your heads once again in prayer with me? Father, we give honor to you this afternoon, and thank you, along with my brothers and sisters here, for this wonderful Chicago Day.
[1:19] Lord, a great expression of your love and grace, and we receive it with joy. And even, Lord, the sunshine of your love, likewise we receive it with joy.

And may you be glorified in our speaking, hearing, and doing of your word. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. A great psalm before us.
A great, great psalm. And I praise God for the opportunity to have immersed myself in the truth of God from his word on this week.
The fourth of the songs of a sense. Psalm 123 is a short psalm, as you can see. Simply four verses. But what a beautiful, precious psalm this is.
Notice, its focus is heavenward. Its imagery is so, so clear. It's a plea for mercy.
[2:27] Mercy from the one who is enthroned in the heavens. There's something also that's quite noticeable about this psalm, that the mood of this psalm differs noticeably from that in Psalm 122.

You remember last week when we were about ready to dance? Not so here. The praise leader is not entering into the house of the Lord with joy.
No hand clapping here. No toe tapping here. The song is of a very different key.
There's a measure here of circumstantial weight. And the tone that we hear coming from this song, it reflects the situation that the pilgrims of that day were in.
You know, it's oftentimes that every day can bring somewhat of a different kind of song. There are blue day songs, blue sky songs, and then there are gray, overcast day kind of songs that you and I sing.
[3:46] The skies are not blue here. The road is not smooth. The territory for the traveler on the journey is not safe.

The reader, you and I, hear and we feel the longings, we feel the sighs, we feel the prayers of this particular psalm. May we be gripped by it.
May the Lord help us to respond accordingly. This psalm speaks to us. It grips us. It ministers to us. And it instructs us, especially when you and I find ourselves in the danger zones of life.
Ever been there? The danger zones of life? For in this life, the sanctified feet of the pilgrim do travel through places where we find ourselves facing unfriendly fire from unfriendly sources in this world.
[4:55] And the situation in this text this afternoon is a situation of corporate distress. The people of God here, they were targets of ungodly people.

Unfriendly fire had come their way. And in view of that, they cry out. Look at verse 3, their cry. They cry out to the Lord for mercy.
You see that? Listen to it. Have mercy upon us, O Lord.
Have mercy upon us. The second part of the verse gives the reason for their plea for mercy.
Why? For we have had, and notice this is the wording there, more than enough of contempt.

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[5:59] So here we see in the last part of verse 3 and in verse 4, we know what I would call the pilgrim's problem. And I use pilgrim's plural.

The problem of the pilgrim's problem. The problem of the pilgrim's is what we see there in verses 3b and 4. And that had, in fact, led to what we see in verses 1 and 2, the posture of the pilgrims.
And we see in verse 3, the plea of the pilgrim's. Those things grew out of what we see in verse 3b and verse 4.
So I want to look at the pilgrim's problem first. Huh? The problem that inspired the song of the psalmist, guess what it was? It was people.
It was a people problem that had inspired or caused the problem for God's people.
[7:06] The people of God were under attack by the kind of people that we see described in verse 3. Notice there with me. For we have had more than enough of contempt.

What kind of people were these? They were disrespectful people. That's the idea behind the word translated contempt that we see in verse 3 and also in verse 4.
They were people without regard and without respect for God or for God's people. These were those who regarded others as insignificant or unimportant.
And guess what? They looked down on them. It would be like it's akin to one team's boasting in their might, belittling an opponent.
They call it trash talking. And that's the way they get into the heads of the opponent to sort of get them off guard. Could be the attitude of the rich toward the needy.
[8:12] Or the attitude of a race that deems itself more superior than another. Could be the attitude of the educated.

Uneducated. We look with them, look upon them with contempt and disregard. It's insensitive.
It's uncaring. It's uncalled for. And it is cruel. Uh-huh. These were people who were dishing out disrespect toward the people of God.
But notice also, not only were they disrespectful, they were complacent. Look at verse 4. It says, Our soul have been more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease.
Huh? The picture is of those who are carefree and relaxed and unruffled and unmoved. Such persons are often insensitive to God.
[9:20] Insensitive to God's people. Ripe for rebuke from the Lord. Passages that refer to those at ease help us to size up these kind of people. We see in Psalm 72, you need in turn 73 verse 12.

Behold, these are the wicked always at ease. They increase in riches and because of that they have a way of being complacent toward others and looking down on them.
Isaiah 32 and verse 9. Rise up you women who are at ease. Hear my voice you complacent daughters. Give ear to my speech.
And then in Amos chapter 6 a more familiar one to us verse 1. Woe unto those who are at ease in Zion.
Huh? And those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria. At ease people are content unworried, satisfied, without due reverence for God and without respect for people.
[10:30] The people that oppose the Lord or the people of God fit that particular description. But there are another description of those and we see that in the last part of 4.

Contempt of the proud. These were arrogant people. That's the word in verse 4 that rounds out the description of those who presented the problem for the pilgrim people of God.
It was a people problem, sure enough. These were the high and mighty, conceited, self-assured.
And the composite picture is that of the puffed up people and the people of God had had their fill of those kind of people.
The words in the text verse 3 and 4 it says we have had more than enough of contempt. More than enough of scorn.
So that's what we see here. And the idea behind the word is to be filled up with, to be saturated with. I love the wording of the NASB. It is we have been greatly filled.
[11:38] Huh? Psalm, that's the Psalm 123 is the song of those who had been saturated like a sponge, soaked with water with the disrespect of hearty people.

Their lives were like full stomachs that could hold no more food. Now it's one thing to have one's stomach filled with good things and the right things and one's life filled with good things.
But that's not the case here. Their enemies were dishing out, disrespect every day, scorn, and ridicule. These were the things on the menu and they were force feeding them on the people of

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God.
The picture, people were the problem, arrogant, haughty people without reverence for God or respect for people. Ugly opposition.
I want to take you to a passage where this setting might have been. Turn with me to Nehemiah. Chapter 2 verses 19 and 20 page 399.
[12:51] some see this as the setting for this particular psalm. It was a post-exilic day. People of God had returned from Babylon and they were about the building project, the temple and the walls there.

But it was there that they were opposed by unfriendly forces in that day. Look at Nehemiah chapter 2 verses 19 and 20. But when Sanballat the Huronite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, notice what they did, they jeered at us and despised us and said, what is this thing that you're doing?
Are you rebelling against the king? Then I replied to them, notice his reply, the God of heaven will make us prosper and we as servants will rise and build.
But you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem. Turn over to the next page, look at page 400, Nehemiah chapter 4 verses 1 through 4.
Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged and noticed he jeered at the Jews.
[14:26] And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, what are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Again, speaking about the wall.

Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish and burn ones at that? Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him and he said, yes, what they're building, if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.
Hero our God, we are despised. We are held with contempt. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in the land where they are captive.
Some feel that the context of Psalm 123 was in this post-exilic time when God's people were being opposed in view of the building that they were trying to revive the work of God there.
They faced opposition. People of God of ages have faced people opposition. opposition.
[15:40] It is not new. One Christian writer put it this way, all through history, true Christians have been the butt of abuse.

Think of the Lollards, the evangelistic preachers of the 14th century, sent out by John Wycliffe. The very name Lollard was a term of abuse. The Puritans, Pietists, and Methodists all received their names as terms of abuse.
The Salvation Army in the 19th century were mocked by the established church. Problem of pilgrims at that time and through the centuries has often been people.
Brothers and sisters around the world even today face the taunts and the terrors of those unfriendly to the Christian faith.
faith. They accept Christ and those who have accepted Christ and live for Christ, they do so. In some places, a great risk to themselves and their loved ones.
[16:50] But the sighs and songs that mimic Psalm 123 can even rise from among us. Don't be surprised if you find yourself a victim of unfriendly fire because of your beliefs and your values.

Unfriendly fire can come from a classroom if you're a student, corporate boardroom if you're a business executive, even a lunchroom from those who don't share your particular values.
A professional colleague or even an entire department can rise up against you primarily on the basis of who you believe in, what you believe, and how you live out your life.
Jesus, remember his words, blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.
Huh? It was a people problem that had caused the people of God pain and they were filled up.
[18:02] with a contempt, the scorn, they had had enough, they had been saturated with that. So I reviewed this message with Shirley, I thought, boy, I wonder, are we attracting that kind of unfriendly fire?

Oftentimes, the fire that comes from Christians, it's friendly fire. fire. Or it's because we have shot ourselves in the foot.
Those are the things that often cause us to cry, Lord, help. But unfriendly fire, many of us don't know very little, if anything, about unfriendly fire.

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fire. And it's like, yes, we have our challenges, and I don't in any way mean to minimize those, but we live relatively comfortably in a land that is friendly to faith.
But oftentimes, listen to me, as the pilgrim walks this journey, his steps being ordered by God's word, every now and then, you're going to hit a stretch, and you're going to be a target, you're going to have a bullseye on you.
[19:25] The psalm instructs us when those times come, what are we to do? The pilgrim's problem was people, the pilgrim's posture in verses 1 and 2, he's, he, the worship leader, as well as the people of God, they are looking up, you see that, to you, in the midst of this unfriendly fire, in the midst of unfriendly people, to you, I lift up my eyes, huh?

That's where they turn to when faced with the problems that we noted in verses 3 and 4, and how instructed that is for us. So it is with marvelous, matchless, poetic beauty that the psalmist writes to you, oh don't you love that, to you, oh you who are enthroned in the heavens, I lift up my eyes, the eyes are the organ in sight, but the heart is the organ of faith.
And the text makes it clear that the one who is enthroned in the heavens is none other than the Lord God. You see that in the last part of 2B, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, none other but Him.
the writer does not look to people of influence. The psalmist may have had people that he could have turned to in distress, but they did not get the call.
The appeal was to the God who was enthroned in the heavens. It was to the high court of the universe. The psalmist goes right to the top.
[21:05] when people rose up against them, the people of Psalm 123, they looked to the Lord. That was also the posture of the psalmist in Psalm 124.

Look at that. When people had risen up against them, look at verse 2. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, what? When people rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up alive.
When their anger was kindled against us, then the flood would have swept us away and the taunt would have gone over us. He knew where to look and challenge with people.
With eyes of faith, the psalmist was able to look beyond the great and grand yet inadequate resources of earth to the one enthroned in the heaven. He looked to the one who is ultimately in charge.
His upward look is a look of faith. And here we have in the Bible one of those my faith looks up to the songs scenes.
[22:15] And I remember as a young man in Sunday school that would be the song that we would sing each week. And then as I look back after I genuinely came to faith, I understand the meaning of those precious songs that I just sang out of routine weekly.

Oh, this is the kind of song and if you would notice that song it spoke about the different stages of life even unto death. my faith looks up to thee thou lamb Calvary huh?
Oh, isn't that where you're looking? Is that where your gaze is fixed on him? Another such scene is in 2nd Chronicles you needn't turn to it you might want to make a reference for it.
But here it was when Jehoshaphat was surrounded by unfriendly forces. 2nd Chronicles chapter 20 verses 4 and 5. But listen, Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem and the house of the Lord before the new court and guess what he says?
Oh, Lord, he looks, his faith arises to the living God. Oh, Lord, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations in your hand are power and might so that none is able to withstand you.
[23:40] And then in verse 12 he says, Oh, our God, will you not execute judgment on them for we are powerless against this great heart that is coming against us? We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.

Again, when faced with this horde of people who were coming to a coalition of forces, several nations had risen up and challenged Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.
But then in that moment of stress and distress his eyes, he leads the nation, taking them before God, leading the other people of God. What an example of leadership.
I have a friend, Larry Mercer, who is the president of Washington Bible College, Capitol Bible Seminary, and their leadership even today in a, and this is somewhat unheard of, they are on a 40-day fast, looking to God to meet the needs of their institution in a time of challenge, where they,

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the leaders, leading them before God, looking up to God for resources that he would open doors, that he would make a way for them.
Who do you look to in times of stress and distress, whether the sources, people, or regardless? Oh, this psalm challenges me to look to God whether the opposition is from around me or sometimes opposition is within you.
[25:21] Where do you look? Where are your eyes? Are you looking to the Lord? Part of the beauty of this psalm is the imagery that we see in verse 2.

The psalmist here draws his fellow pilgrims into the confines of the home. Behold, as the eyes of the servant look to the hands of their masters and as the eyes of the maid servant to the hand of their mistress, our eyes look to the Lord our God till he has mercy upon us.
They were undoubtedly familiar with how life was conducted in the domain and that domain and that included superior and subordinate servant and master one who owned everything and others who owned nothing.
Several things can be in view as such as a servant watching and waiting for the various hand signals of the master and I think that that's a view that has merit but on the other hand it seems to make sense that what is pictured here is actually more comprehensive perhaps the figure of speech that we know as metonymy where the hand of the master is figurative of the whole life of the master and thus we find a picture of a wise benevolent source of all that the servant needed including mercy and I think mercy is in view because that is in fact what they asked for until he has mercy upon us including mercy for the present moment for the present time of distress that they found themselves in does not some
Psalm 145 verses 15 and 16 say the eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season you open your hand you satisfy the desire of every living thing and then Matthew chapter 24 verse 45 who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time the master's responsibility was to care for all who were in his household and servants look for the master to do nothing less than that how would then a servant look to a master singularly and intently and so must we look to the
[28:28] Lord alone the servant will look expectantly and hopefully and so you and I must look to him with anticipation the servant will look to him patiently can't hurry the big boss in his time until he has mercy upon us we look to him in those kinds of ways we must look to him humbly and respectfully the way we would look to a sovereign and supreme master and humble ourselves before him accordingly and not only that but we look to him confidently we look to him with certainty that in his time and in his way he will answer our prayer that prayer was be gracious you see the pilgrim's plea there as we look on down in verse three and this is the psalm of the eyes and my eyes and the eyes of the servant and the eyes of the handmaid and then our eyes but also notice the repetition of until he has mercy upon us and then they begin to make a plea to God that he would have mercy on them so he's postured for mercy on the one hand and that he is looking to the

Lord but also he pleads for mercy he prays for mercy in verse three there's both an upward look of his body but also there's the upward look of his soul and upward focus of his prayers to God he calls for the Lord's mercy and it's an appeal not simply for personal mercy as great as that might be but it's for corporate mercy it's not simply have mercy on me it's have mercy on us huh I like NESB the way they render this they do not render the words that were translated in DSV mercy I think and I think that they render it a little more closely is be gracious to us you see because behind the idea of grace that they were pleading for it grace in the Old Testament sense was the unmerited favor of a superior to an inferior so here you had the servants and again and we are God's servants who are inferior calling on a superior for mercy when he asked for mercy what is he asking for he asked the Lord to be gracious to have compassion on his people who are faced with the scorn and ridicule of those who regard not God or man a plea for mercy grace and compassion from the Lord because of the scorn and arrogance of those who could care less about God's people so when faced with unfriendly fire and forces in the world the people of God must turn their eyes and their hearts toward heaven to the one who is enthroned there and who is it that is enthroned there we know the one who is enthroned there do we not this psalm in essence points to the one who has been exalted to heaven and is enthroned there even Jesus to the one who endured unfriendly fire in this world when he did so he turned his eyes toward heaven in Hebrews chapter 5 I believe it it says that he was heard that's what Jesus did shall we not turn our eyes to him the writer of Hebrews helps us to see several things that connect us with this psalm 123 he helps us to see that there is the son has a

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throne but of the throne of the son he says your throne oh
God is forever and ever in Hebrews chapter 1 in verse 8 it helps us also to see the nature of that throne the throne is a throne of mercy in chapter 4 verse 16 let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and help grace to help in the time of need the son has the throne that throne is a throne of mercy but also the third thing when we look to the son we look to the one who is enthroned in the heavens looking unto Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endure the cross despising the shame and seated at the right hand of the throne of God so it says consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you do not grow faint and weary Hebrews chapter one chapter 12 verses one through three oh he teaches us to look to the son that's who you and
I are to look to in our day every step of our journey Christians are to look to none other than the Lord Jesus for mercy it's the kind of mercy that mirrors the mercy that you and I received at the cross mercy there was great grace was free pardon there was multiplied to me there my burdened soul found liberty oh that was the entry that was the entry place in the journey with the Lord we receive initial mercy there but that mercy is the kind of mercy that continues with the pilgrim as he goes in on his journey because we have tasted of the great and grand mercies of God at Calvary the source of which was God through
[34:42] Christ why should you and I look to any other source at any other time on our Christian journey regardless of the kind of territory that we find ourselves walking on the great mercy received!

you got when you entered into the Christian faith it's mercy that continues with you along every step of the Christian journey abundant!
mercy that fits any and all situation mercy that's molded in heaven but experienced on earth delivered to you and me you see the people of God in Psalm 123 were saturated they had been dist out with disrespect filled up with it but that's not the kind of thing that God gives he daily loads us with benefits mercy included the diet of the enemy is one thing but the diet of God what he gives those who are his and who walk along this journey that is absolutely something else and for this reason you and I can continue to sing even when the road gets rough the taunts and teases from those who know not the Lord are loud and long but we can make our way to the one who will be gracious to us in every time or situation of need that you and I have so we come to a psalm that is simple in its composition but profound in its content as far as helping us to see again helping perhaps some of us to take the scales off of our eyes and see the one who is high and lifted up who wants to endue us with mercy as the situation is needed demands
I encourage us to do several things as we about to wrap up ask the question are we living the kind of life that attracts unfriendly fire are we living that kind of life that attracts unfriendly fire where people might take issue with us and I'm not going out and say go pick a fight that's not what I'm saying but I do think we do need to ask ourselves those kind of questions are we a factor are we people of little minimal or little consequence need to ask ourselves those kind of questions in this world and who knows what the Lord might be preparing us for down the way just look at that sun coming through the window there but y'all know what winter's coming winter is going to come and I drive up the lake front oh what a beautiful scene green and waters out there but
I know after a while and by and by the chill will return it will be here and even so who knows what's down the road your sky is blue in your life now you you've got smooth riding you're taking the bumps nicely they've got some of those potholes filled now don't they oh but the journey through life includes potholes ask yourself are we living the kinds of lives that attract unfriendly fire but then as people have gone on a journey through life you and I to keep our eyes on him and offer him my sighs and songs during all seasons even when the journey is through unfriendly territory songs are appropriate as well as sighs won't you pray with me father we give thanks for your goodness to us and we bless and exalt your holy name our eyes are on you our prayers are directed to you and we ask for your grace and mercy to help us
[39:22] Lord and I don't know some may hear even today may be along a stretch of road may not be people problems but they're stressed and distressed and I pray Lord that every eye here may look to you and find mercy and grace to help in the time of need may we look to none other but you you you are our God God our guard and our guide we look to none other none other but you and we bless your name amen the deacons are coming as we sing our last song to!

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