

Psalms of Ascent - Psalm 123

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[0 : 0 0] well thank you Matthew for the scripture reading for our prayer for everyone else who participated so far in the service which is all of us so I'm excited to open God's word with you but what I look to do is just highlight a few things one our youth are at camp this week and so if you're wondering where all the teenagers that's where they are and we're excited for them camp has a very dear place in my heart and in many of the people here so they are up there learning about the Lord with a bunch of other churches that we partner with so the Inland Northwest Cooperative a lot of teens are up there so we're excited for them and we pray this week that they would deepen their love for Christ have fun and enjoy fellowship but ultimately Lord that they would come back to us refreshed and rejuvenated and ready to follow at even a greater capacity so keep them in your prayers this week our youth as they come back midweek psalm 123 thank you for reading Matthew we are going to dive into this pretty abbreviated short psalm it's one of the shorter ones in the psalms of ascent but I want to start off today with a quick story and I'll call my story Ty and his number two Ticonderoga I can't even say it Ty and his number two Ticonderoga now what is the number two Ticonderoga anybody know what that is there we go all right all right well pencils are kind of going out and pens have come in in the last like 50 years and so apparently I've mentioned this to a few people and they're like what's a Ticonderoga number two and I'm like what well I'm old enough to know what that is and to have used it in school and so I had a friend named Ty he was in my class in high school and my class was known as the rebellious class to the point to where when we went through our graduation rehearsals the day before our superintendent we were not paying attention we weren't following instructions and our superintendent that literally said on a live mic he said this is why no one likes you guys merced if you guys get out of here he said that and apologized to us later that tells you a lot about our high school class

Ty was at the absolute top in terms of rebellion he was the ringleader he was the Samuel Adams of the class okay and here's what Ty used to do especially in our English class he would go over to the pencil sharpener and he would sharpen his pencil which is totally allowed how long do you and maybe three or four seconds right Ty would just hold it until the teacher told him to stop and then stop Ty and then he'd walk back to us well there was one day in class where the teacher left the classroom I don't remember why no one remembers why we're working on assignment and Ty gets up he walks over this long brand new Ticonderoga and he sticks it in and he grinds it for five minutes all the way down she walks back in and goes Ty go sit down he walks back his pencil was that long you couldn't even see the end of it why do I share that story to start the sermon today this is a weird story right well

I think today's psalm is for the times when we feel like a whittled down number two pencil the sharp wearing away of the soul has finally reached its end there's no more to be worn away we are at our end we're ready for relief we feel like we've been grinded down to the very nub and now it's just a metal cylinder and an eraser if you feel like that today then this psalm is for you if you don't feel like that today the psalm is still for you and here's why because we will be in the shoes of those that do feel like that today at some point we have all been there we feel whittled down enough I can't take anymore psalm 123 is for us so I've broken the psalm into two sections really brilliant I know there's four verses the first section is verse one and two the second section is verse three and four so the first section here is our eyes long for God our eyes long for God so verse one and two I'm going to read them again to you I lift up my eyes oh 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 look to the hand of her mistress so our eyes look to the Lord our God till he has mercy upon us now this psalm starts off with singular pronouns very similar to one of the other psalms we've studied so you'll notice it starts with I lift my eyes and then the rest of it is going to use communal plural language are we us

so what we have here is a psalmist someone that has taken the time to write the poetry to put it to music and to offer it to the community of God that they might sing it together one person has written this and prepared it that the entire congregation would sing it together and similar to psalm 121 which we did two weeks ago I want us to notice the opening image of this song our eyes are being lifted up to see something but unlike psalm 121 where it was more of a metaphorical even rhetorical I look up my eyes to the hills where's my help oh it's not going to come from the hills it's going to come from the

Lord who made all things this one is direct there's no question there's no rhetorical nature of this it's simply this I know definitively that I lift my eyes to one that can help and I know and I declare it is the one who's enthroned above the heavens again we have the image of enthroned above the heavens which is similar to creator of earth and heaven which was used in psalm 121 the image being this that someone who sits enthroned above all that has been made clearly must have authority over it and thus is capable of coming to our aid that's the picture here so again we start off with this declarative confidence in the one that made all things and that establishes us going forward but then we have in verse two this is fascinating a really image a really interesting image it's a simile that the poet uses and the simile is of two images here a a servant serving a master and a maid servant serving a mistress and both images are it's a it's a device where you use two things to compound one idea and both images are teaching us the same thing and it's this that for the servant or the maid servant their role in their relationship is to entrust themselves to the master and the mistress but also from the other perspective what's the role of the master or the mistress here the master and the mistress symbolize positions of authority over the servant or more specifically in this context the way it's being pitched to us is this that the master and the mistress are not just in authority over the the two subservient people imaged but instead it's also this that they no longer they're not just in authority but they have concern for care of and are watching over the people that they have entrusted to them and so these servants i'm going to offer to us are looking for relief not orders the relationship presumably in the image of the servant and the maid servant is one of love trust care and i think it's important for us to take a second to think about what is my relationship with the lord do we read this and say yes i am the lord's servant and he is my drill master and he commands and i must do or is it more the lord loves me cares for me and wants my best and when i reach out to him i know that as a loving kind father he will meet my needs i would suggest the latter is the tone of this verse is it true that we are his servants and we must do what he commands yes and that's conveyed in so many other places in scripture maybe even here a little bit but the grand tone of this verse is one that one scholar says pilgrims stretch out their hands in supplication to god who will show his favor to the servants which is why at the end of the verse let's finish verse two it says this so our eyes look to the lord our god until he has mercy upon us the picture here is that if we extend our faith-filled hand toward the father he will take our hand mercifully and graciously so when it says he has mercy on us at the end of verse two if we are meant to compare ourselves with the servants which i believe we are here and god with the master then we can assume that when it says until he has mercy upon us this central idea is that we are to look to god as a loving master and we can expect him to show mercy to us we are his servants we are dependent on him he has authority over our lives and he loves us those are all the basic tenets of this verse now moving to verse three and four if verses one and two was our eyes long for god verse three and four is our souls cry out to god so let's read verse three and four have mercy upon us oh 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 and right at the beginning of verse three we have the immediate application if verse two is true that we are to see god as a loving kind master over us then verse three must be our response have mercy upon us oh lord have mercy upon us in appealing to god pleading to him crying out to that one and the fact that there's repetition here keys us into the fact that this is really important have mercy upon us have mercy upon us what is mercy we have to talk about it because it's definitely the central idea and even the central word of the psalm well the word mercy here can be interpreted and defined as to show grace to show favor to extend mercy to extend a hand and it can actually be translated in our english translations as mercy grace favor or even more but i'm going to offer to us that while mercy and grace might be appropriate the greatest the best most applicable translation in our language is favor favor if favor is the concept here it explains the metaphor in verse two the best that the maid servants and the servants look and they know that the one that they serve is one that wants to grant favor to them to be kind to them and to treat them in a way that is befitting to his

character favor the lord shows favor to his loving servants by helping them in their time of need and this is divine favor that the god of the universe who inhabits the heavens of whom humankind is owed nothing grants blessing to those whom he loves and the idea of favor here show us your favor show us your favor for the us on this side of the cross need to understand that favor with god is a channel open to the believer through the work of christ and carried on throughout our lives through the ministry of the holy spirit and what's noteworthy about this verse notice this that there's no plea for any specific type of favor that god would show but instead it's broad show us favor it's almost as if the servants that are crying out they're they're saying lord we need help please show us your great favor and we're going to leave it up to you to determine what that looks like practically there are other times in the psalms where a specific plea is used like would you do away with my enemies would you rescue me from this current affliction on and on would you meet my needs my daily bread but in this verse it's open lord we know that you are good and we know that you can give us everything we need and more

[13 : 51] so all we're appealing to is that you would just have favor and let god work out what that looks like faith in supplication and that's something for us today that when we ask of the lord to do something in our lives that we would trust that he would do it and when it doesn't look exactly like we thought it was lord i asked you for this and it wasn't exactly what i was hoping for that we would not become bitter or resentful but instead we would say but lord i know that your favor is up to you in the way that you would show it so what is the specific challenge here this is where the pencil begins to wind down the specific challenge to israel is this that they are held in contempt by others let's read this verse end of verse three here 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 again we've got the the word for favor used twice we get the word for contempt used twice imagine these two as two separate ideas that bounce off each other and relate we feel contempt and we need your favor that's the psalm boiled down into one concept but here's the thing about contempt what does contempt even mean it's an intense despising or hatred you could define it as such but coupled with this idea that we're held in contempt notice also in verse four our souls had more than enough of this contempt but also of the scorn of those who are at ease so you've got contempt and scorn two things that are happening to the Lord's people let's talk about these for a second contempt intense despising or hatred scorn the word here being stammering isn't that interesting stammering repetitive rebuking and reviling over and over and over again the same sort of reviling that's what the word scorn is what is it like to be held in contempt by others well I would offer to us that being held in contempt is one of the worst feelings there is on earth to be held in contempt means that there's somebody or a group out there that looks at you and when they look at you what do they think

I hate that person I despise that person the things they stand for the things they do the things they say the things they believe I despise everything there is about that human being that's what it's like to be held in contempt to know that someone absolutely despises you in this life is a heavy feeling and it's a feeling that will wear you down over time so why does Israel appeal to the mercy or favor of God to resolve this feeling we feel that contempt by the people around us it's because God looks at his children not with contempt but with delight before we even talk about how do we deal with these feelings of contempt we have to first recognize that God himself doesn't see us this way that through the gospel there's a transformation not just of my being and my heart but also of the way that the Lord views me and the way that I relate to him

God looks at his children with delight there was once division in our relationship there was once shame there was once an inexpressible strain between a holy God and his sinful formerly sinful people but all in all contempt and shame is removed for the glorious work of Jesus Christ because we are not held in contempt by God anymore because of what Jesus has done we can freely and boldly extend our needy hand to him in our time of need from those on earth who do hold us in contempt see the gospel instantaneously transformed God's view of us from sinner to saint and radically changes our view of God from fear to joyful longing in his book the weight of glory C.S. Lewis said this concerning this dynamic in the end that face which is the delight of the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us in judgment either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised brothers and sisters we are those who will not look at the Lord and see shame in ourselves but instead we are those that the Lord will look at someday even now and confer what he calls glory inexpressible but the reality is still true that on

this earth we are held in contempt let's talk about that there's a verb that's used here that's very interesting

I want you to notice in verse 3 have mercy upon us the Lord have mercy upon us for we have had more than enough of contempt again verse 4 our soul has had more than enough of the scorn and the contempt this idea of more than enough is to eat one's fill or to be satiated I want you to imagine Thanksgiving dinner you enjoy the turkey the stuffing all of the glorious food if you're like me my mom goes crazy every single Thanksgiving may feel this way I eat and eat and eat I even eat some dessert and what do I do I just sit there and go oh I am full I'm satiated feel that just that weight in your stomach and then someone comes to and says hey one more piece of pumpkin pie what do you say no I can't that's the verb imagine that feeling after a big Thanksgiving meal and now apply it to feeling contempt from people

I can't take any more of all of the people around me looking me this way it weighs on us it grinds the pencil down we talked about so let's look into this idea contempt who is Israel talking about I want you to notice there's no subject that's given it's not clear who it is that he's talking about a lot of times they'll even name nations like the Moabites or the Ammonites or the people that took us into exile the Assyrians the Babylonians there's a lot of language where they will address the people that they feel are against them this psalm is very vague it just simply gives us the idea that there are people that hold us in contempt perhaps these are onlookers who laugh at and mock the pilgrims as they make a long difficult journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast from the heathen's perspective imagine watching all of these people travel through a horrible treacherous dry land just to go do something religious that would seem like a massive waste of time and let's ridicule them right maybe it's a neighboring nation of that time that hated Israel's guts the psalm's written around David maybe it's his time maybe it's the Philistines

[21 : 32] Milibites or Ammonites they're talking about or if it's post-exilic like some people think it is maybe they're talking about their former oppressors regardless of who it is here's what we do know it doesn't indicate the identity but we do know that these people incessantly poured out their disapproval dislike and disrespect of God's chosen people and they do it in this manner notice there's those who are at ease and the proud defines this group of people at ease nonchalant carefree disposition likely this suggests people who have security and pleasures in life and can afford to ridicule others proud literally those who think of themselves highly what do we when do we typically look down on other people when we ourselves are on top of the world when people believe they're in a high elevated position they look down on others so again we don't know exactly who the people are but we know their MO it's to look down on what seems to be foolish or unwise

Israel certainly understood this as a nation set apart in every way from the nations of the world their culture laws worship militaristic might everything was done in a different manner than the nations of the world and the psalmist here clearly reflects that the nation sees this and they know we are held in contempt and for this morning I want you to know that we have something in common with Israel today those who attempt to live lives that are set apart from the world will experience contempt the very act of living in a set apart manner carries with it a rejection of the world and its systems and for this the world will hate us if we choose to pursue holiness in this life we should expect to be held in contempt so today who might be the at ease and proud oppressors of the church maybe academics professors philosophers atheists

I've interacted with all of them in my lifetime who refute the concept of God from intellectual grounds maybe these people might look like people in the scientific field astronomers biologists etc.

who scoff at any notion of God or created world that's ridiculous right false religions who enforce their religion through might and oppression instead of belief and compassion radical governments who outlaw belief in God and try to sterilize society with their own agendas maybe these are some of the ways that these people look in the modern day but I want to suggest to you there are some ways that the world holds the church in contempt today that we don't just read this text and say man Israel had a lot of enemies and that would have been tough man I can't imagine the whole world hating you well for me and for us I want us to realize that's not just an identity for Israel that's identity for God's people cosmically until Jesus returns and rights all wrongs and separates the sheep from the goats this will be the reality that those that live for the kingdom of God and his glorious light will stand out from a dark world and when that happens the dark world will not like that and they will attack those in

God's kingdom while defending God's truth the church is called to uphold the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman we will be and have been called bigoted and hateful for this and held in contempt standing for life and protecting the unborn we will be called and have been prejudiced and oppressive and held in contempt rejecting worldliness in the passions of the flesh we will be and have been called lame and elitist and held in contempt when proclaiming the gospel beginning with the sinfulness of humanity as we ought to we will be called insensitive and judgmental and held in contempt finally when preaching the exclusivity of Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and to God we will be held in contempt for not being inclusive so here's my call to us that we would identify with

[26 : 00] Jesus the psalmist conveys a reality that the nation was feeling that we are held in contempt by those that hate us that don't agree with our worldview but not only that that don't agree with our God and our identity as people of God and want to attack us for both Israel then Jesus during his life and the church now we have to recognize that this is part of the Christian identity Jesus himself warns his followers that to associate themselves with him is to welcome the same treatment from the world that he experienced he said if the world hates you then it has hated me that know that it has hated me before it hated you if you were of the world the world would love you as one of its own but because you are not of the world because I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you this is a description of the church but it's also a description of Israel in Psalm 123 you're not of the world of course you're going to be held in contempt so here's

Jesus Isaiah 53 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 Jesus was scorned and barraged with contempt!

in obeying the will of the Father so the church takes on the identity of her Savior that's our calling brothers and sisters to endure hatred from the world that we might shine his light and cling to the love of the Father as the church we are set apart from the world in many of the ways in which I just shared but the ultimate factor that sets us apart what is it it's our allegiance to and identification with the suffering servant church we have willingly associated with the very man who was held in contempt by the world the world would not accept Jesus so they persecuted him holiness and persecution go hand in hand in the Bible which is why Paul says those weighty words in 2 Timothy 3 to his young pupil imagine you're discipling a young person into the faith and you say these words to them indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse deceiving and be deceived and here imagine telling this to a young person that's amazing you will be persecuted because you're identifying with Jesus but continue on anyway oh the great faith of Paul and the encouragement for this young man Timothy when Jesus becomes your savior and you become his child you take on his seal like a soldier takes on the seal of the nation they serve or an athlete takes on the seal of their team when they go out onto the court to compete so too we take the seal of Christ and when we do that the seal becomes visible to the world when we live holy lives the seal stands out and when that seal stands out the world becomes hostile like a Boston Red Sox fan wearing his colors proudly surrounded by a sea of Yankees at a Yankee stadium game in the Bronx oppression will come but unlike the allegiance to a sports team allegiance to Christ is holistic it touches every aspect of our being our thoughts our words our actions our affections our hopes they're all in allegiance to Jesus but take courage church that the same seal that identified us with

Christ in this earth that brought so much persecution and suffering is the same seal that will give us right a passage one day into the comfort of his arms in our heavenly help those who mourn will be comforted so what do we do when we're held in content by the world and encourage this church with this this psalm is teaching us clearly like everything we just talked about to not take shame to not be ashamed to not regret to not lose heart in the fact that we identify with Jesus be confident in Christ identity in us yes but practically speaking when we feel the contempt!

[30 : 40] the world we must learn to pray verse 3 again have mercy upon us oh Lord have mercy upon us for we have had more than enough of contempt the pencil is worn thin there is nothing left to grind and the people of God at this desperate hour Lord we're at our end there's nothing more that can be worn down in our soul you have to act so we ask in confidence and faith that your favor would be with us that's the appeal and we can learn from this our Lord Jesus modeled this as well the despised and rejected one found strength in times of contempt by meeting with his father in prayer we find him isolated from the disciples regularly in the gospels so too we must take the

example of Jesus and find strength in prayer when we feel the affliction of the world but here's my call to us this morning that we would not just pray but that we would pray our heart what do

I mean by pray our heart it means that we share with God what we are feeling when we feel it pray our heart it means that we share with God what we are feeling when we feel it again Jesus demonstrates this in Gethsemane feeling the weight of the cross and the weight of impending wrath that is to be poured out on him to free sinners he goes to God in prayer and he says all I've talked to many many Christians in my life myself being one of them talking to myself reading the prayer in Gethsemane and even wondering getting to a point at time saying does Jesus lack faith here the answer is no he didn't lack faith he models for us what it looks like to pray!

with the heart to share with God what we are feeling when we feel it this is what God wants from us what is it that allows our souls to cry out in confidence Jesus God is ready to be merciful and to show favor to us but he has already done so as well through Jesus work Israel knew this in a different sense they knew that Yahweh loved them they knew!

He chose them not because he we give to Jesus we bring him our worries our cares our burdens and he will have favor and mercy and grace on us again and again and again because he's already done this marvelously through his atoning work we have received!

unmerited favor for eternity through his work and so it is right to go to God with all that we are and all that we feel and all that we have when we are held in contempt church we pray our heart come sit at the feet of Jesus today in longing prayer pray your heart to him for those of us in here who may not know Christ or may be in a place of doubt I want to ask you do the same thing this morning pray your heart pour out all that you feel this morning if you doubt that have your heart anyway pray that Jesus would reveal himself to you and show his favor to you let us not lose heart when hostility and content from the world comes upon us individually or corporately as a church instead we have the divine privilege of a

[34 : 59] God who's ready to hear ready to listen with a handout. Pray your heart to him, church. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this text that encourages us.

Thank you that, Lord, you are enthroned in the heavens. I thank you that there is no contempt that has ever befallen your people that you didn't know about, that you were unprepared for, that you cannot do away with, Lord.

So, Lord, we pray that as your people, when we experience these feelings of anxiety or contempt or hatred from others, Lord, I pray that, Lord, it would be our privilege and joy to come before you and to share all.

Lord, I pray that you'd unfetter our hearts and to freely share with you when we need encouragement from you and your favor. Lord, I want to pray this over us this morning that we would humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time you might exalt us.

Casting our cares on you because you care for us. And after we have suffered a little while, you, our God of grace, who has called us to your eternal glory in Christ, will yourself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us.

[36 : 16] To you be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Amen. Thank you.