

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 123 — Looking for Grace

1.0 Introducing Psalm 123

- As the first psalm in the second set of three psalms in the Psalms of Ascents, Psalm 123 faces trouble and problems in much the same way as Psalm 120.
 - ✓ *Troubled travelers turn to God for grace.*
 - ✓ For the first time in the Psalms of Ascents, the psalmist addresses God directly.
- The source of trouble eludes identification in Psalm 120, but 123 places blame on comfortable scoffers and contemptible swaggerers.
 - ✓ Trouble comes from arrogant scoffers — the Bill Mahers of the world who would declare anyone insane who believes in God.
- This is the world we live in — a fallen and antagonistic world. But, we must not allow our outward view to control our lives.

2.0 Reading Psalm 123 (NAU)

123:1 A Song of Ascents.

To You I lift up my eyes,
O You who are enthroned in the heavens!

123:2 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes *look* to the LORD our God,
Until He is gracious to us.

123:3 Be gracious to us, O LORD, be gracious to us,
For we are greatly filled with contempt.

123:4 Our soul is greatly filled

With the scoffing of those who are at ease,
And with the contempt of the proud.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 123

3.1 Outline

- I. Looking Up to God (vv. 1–2)
- II. Living Up to Grace (vv. 3–4)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “To You I lift up my eyes”
 - As believers we look neither at nor down on God — we look up.
 - This is the posture of a servant. We do not command God; He commands us.
 - Compare Psalm 121:1 for the same upward look.
 - “If we want to see God the way he really is, we must look to the place of authority — to Scripture and to Jesus Christ.
“And do we really want it any other way? I don’t think so. We would very soon become contemptuous of a god whom we could figure out like a puzzle or learn to use like a tool. No, if God is worth our attention at all, he must be a God we can look up to — a God we *must* look up to . . .” — Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 59.
 - See Hebrews 12:2–3.
 - *Where should we look in times of trouble?*
- v. 1 “You who are enthroned in the heavens!”
 - “Enthroned” depicts a sovereign God Who is in control of all things.
 - Compare Psalms 55:19; 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 6:1; 37:16.
 - The pilgrim’s goal is not an earthly, or a heavenly, city — it is God Himself.
 - ✓ Therefore, the psalmist addresses God directly.
 - When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He instructed them to begin with this same concept: “Our Father, who is in heaven . . .” (Matt 6:9).
- v. 2 “as the eyes of servants”
 - Dependence and servanthood explain the upward look to God.
 - *What characteristics must we manifest as servants of God?*
- v. 3 “Be gracious to us”
 - Readers dare not ignore the triple statement concerning grace. It is the focal point of Psalm 123.
 - What is divine grace?
 - ✓ **Not** treating us according to what we deserve.
 - ✓ **Not** doing for us what He does not want to do.
 - ✓ **Not** giving us what we want.
 - ✓ **Not** rewarding us for good deeds.
 - ✓ **Not** being nice to us because we’re so good.

- v. 4 “we are greatly filled with contempt”
 - The psalmist states that he is filled with an abundance — he’s “had it up to here” (“fed up”) with the contempt of the world around him.
 - Contempt is characteristic of the wicked (Proverbs 18:3).
 - Compare Psalm 31:18.
- v. 4 “the scoffing”
 - “Scoffing” means a stammering derision spoken with intense dislike into the face of its target.
 - Compare Psalms 22:6–8; 44:13; 79:4; 80:7.
- v. 4 “those who are at ease”
 - People become complacent when their comforts are greater than their challenges or dangers.
 - Amos 6:1–8 describes the arrogance of the complacent, who have lost all spiritual sensitivity or awareness. They are ripe for divine judgment.
 - *What might lead believers into a state of complacency and arrogance?*

4.0 Singing Psalm 123

“To Thee, O Lord, I Lift Mine Eyes”

(Tune: “He Leadeth Me” or “And Can It Be That I Should Gain?” or “Sweet Hour of Prayer”)



To Thee, O Lord, I lift mine eyes,
O Thou enthroned above the skies;
As servants watch their master’s hand,
Or maidens by their mistress stand;
So to the Lord our eyes we raise,
Until His mercy He displays.

Refrain

*To Thee, O Lord, I lift mine eyes,
O Thou enthroned above the skies.*

O Lord, our God, Thy mercy show,
For man’s contempt and scorn we know;
Reproach and shame Thy saints endure
From wicked men who dwell secure;
Man’s proud contempt and scorn we know;
O Lord, our God, Thy mercy show.

Refrain

*To Thee, O Lord, I lift mine eyes,
O Thou enthroned above the skies.*

5.0 Praying Psalm 123

- Lord, I am looking to You for help. [v. 1]
- You are in control, O God. [v. 1]
- Show me Your grace, Lord, even though I am undeserving. [v. 3]
- Deliver your people from arrogant scoffers, Father. [vv. 3, 4]

6.0 Applying Psalm 123

- In troubled times we must look upward, because God alone controls all things.
- In troubled times we must look inward to realize our need for divine grace.