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)
   - 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?

II. Living Up to Grace (vv. 3–4)
   - Dependence and servanthood explain the upward look to God.
   - What characteristics must we manifest as servants of God?

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.

• 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.

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

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.