

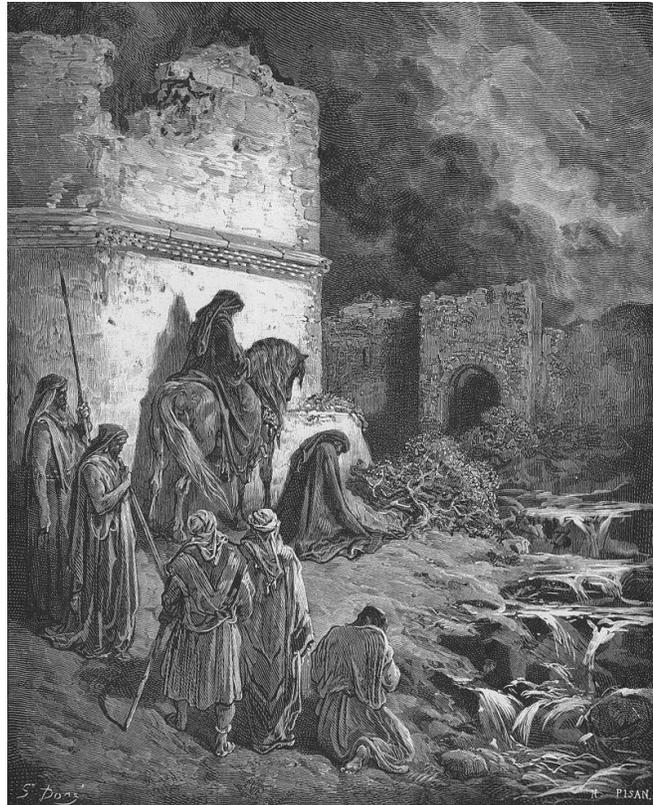
Psalms of Ascent

Part 4 – Our Longing Eyes

Psalm 123

The Psalms of Ascent give expression to the range of human emotions and experiences. With Psalm 123 we see that even once the pilgrims had entered the holy city their griefs did not disappear. God's people in the Old Covenant experienced turbulence throughout their existence as a nation. The same is true for the church. There has never been a time when the church has been free from trouble and threats either from without or within. This Psalm may well have been written in response to the shame experienced at the contempt of those who opposed Nehemiah during the project to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

The traveler of Psalm 121 learned to direct his eyes above the troubling scenes upon "the hills." Though troubled and wounded the writer of Psalm 123 nevertheless casts his gaze heavenward. He trusts that God, who is "enthroned in the heavens" is the sovereign God who "does whatever he pleases" (115:3).



Nehemiah surveys the broken walls of Jerusalem

Because God is sovereign over all things we can call out to him for mercy. It makes no sense to cry out for mercy if God cannot actually direct circumstances and people. It is true that God's mercy sometimes comes to us in ways that do not initially look like mercy. But God loves mercy. He loves it more than he loves justice. And he has been and will be merciful to his people. If we doubt this then we need look no further than the cross upon which he sacrificed his Son. No greater mercy has there ever been. No greater mercy will there ever be.

Main Idea: God's people must look to Him for mercy as they experience the mockery and mistreatment of the world.

Vs. 1 – The Psalmist asserts his attentiveness to prayer. The direction of his prayers are to "the LORD" whose sovereignty is established over all creation. Proper prayer always places confidence in God's rule over the created order. "I lift up my eyes to you" is a physical act which emphasizes the intensity of his praying.

Vs. 2 – The Psalmist uses two similes to give expression to the people's proper posture before the sovereign Lord. The "servant" and "maidservant" are depicted as looking to their master/mistress for provision. God's people are to have the same sort of attentiveness in their prayers. The eyes of the servant give attention to the hand of the master. With his eye the servant looks to the Master. With his hand the Master provides for the needs of his servant.

This attentiveness continues until the Lord in his mercy acts. The verb translated "has mercy" typically refers to favor which is undeserved. The appeal for mercy is not a demand for rights deserved. Rather the prayer is to receive grace or unmerited blessing.

Vv. 3-4 – Here the prayer turns to a direct appeal for the Lord to "have mercy upon us." The request is repeated as to emphasize the desperation of the Psalmist. The need for mercy is made clear. Unbelievers were scorning the faithful and treating them with contempt. The contempt has been so relentless that the people have been filled with it as one who has been filled after too large a meal.

Contempt is an arrogant and condescending attitude that looks upon something or someone as worthless. Contempt is made known through contemptuous acts. It is both verbal ridicule and mistreatment.

Scorn is similar to contempt but not synonymous. It carries the idea of scoffing, mocking, and laughing at. God's people feel as though they have had all the scorn, mocking, and mistreatment they can take.

1. Our grievous experience of shame.

Vv. 3-4

- The Psalmist is praying on the behalf of the people of God. He lifts up his eyes to the Lord for the purpose of interceding for the full company of the faithful. It is not until the final two verse that we understand the need fueling the prayer. God's people are experiencing the contempt and scorn of the ungodly. Shame can become so overwhelming that the sufferer feels as though it has become the controlling reality for his or her life. This seems to be what the Psalmist is describing.
- Contempt – May be translated as “shame.” The words and actions of the ungodly had heaped shame upon God's people.
- Scorn – Usually describes hateful and mocking words. Jesus was scorned by the soldiers and onlookers as he was dying on the cross.
- There were many instances in Israel's history when this was their experience. The word translated “scorn” appears only in connection with Hezekiah (Isa. 37:22), the exile (Ezek. 36:4), and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:19; 4:1).

2. Our proper understanding of self.

Vs. 2

- God's people understand that they have been adopted into God's family through the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sons and daughters of God by grace through faith in Jesus. However we are also servants to our Lord. The Apostle Paul who reveled in the grace that made him a son nevertheless used the term “slave” more than any other to describe himself. We must never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is not only our Savior. He is our Lord and we his servants. But his Lordship is exercised on our behalf in profoundly benevolent ways. Therefore when we come to him we can be assured of his kind intentions.

3. Our confident focus upon God.

Vs. 1

- This is a Psalm of prayer. When the Psalmist writes that he has lifted his eyes to the Lord he means that he is looking to him fervent petition. He has come to the end of himself and realizes that his only hope is in the Lord.
- That the Lord is seated in the heavens is not meant to suggest that he is far away or aloof. Rather this description affirms the Lord's sovereignty over the entire created order. He is not a weak God or divine figurehead. He is the sovereign Lord who rules his creation. Because of this the people of God can come to him in prayer with great confidence.