

Ascend:
What are We to Do When We Have Had Enough?
Psalm 123

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Text Introduction: We are considering Psalm 120-134 this summer. This is a collection of Psalms each bearing the heading, "A Song of Ascents." The songs of ascents are a compilation of Psalms in the larger book of Psalms.

To what does this heading refer? Most believe that these are songs that worshippers sang as they made their way to Jerusalem (being on a higher plain) for thrice annual special times of worship.¹ If this is so, then we learn a great deal about what was on their hearts as they approached worship and thus understand what should be upon our hearts as we prepare to worship or just give attention to the subject of worship. This thought will guide us in the weeks to come. As we have been learning, this is not so much as a practical guide to the "how to" of worship, but instead a theological mine for what prompts earnest worship.

Some have further suggested that these 15 songs are divided into groups of three. Each group of three forms a sub-unit of sorts. If this indeed is true, then today we are beginning a new triad. Our Psalm today is Psalm 123.

Text: I lift my eyes to You,
the One enthroned in heaven.

² Like a servant's eyes on his master's hand,
like a servant girl's eyes on her mistress's hand,
so our eyes are on the LORD our God
until He shows us favor.

³ Show us favor, LORD, show us favor,
for we've had more than enough contempt.

⁴ We've had more than enough
scorn from the arrogant
and contempt from the proud.

Introduction: You have heard it. You probably have said it. "I have had enough!" I think I heard a Bible School teacher say that this week. (I'm just kidding.) As Chuck Swindoll sub-titled his 2004 book *Getting through the Rough Stuff*, "It's always something!"

A couple of Sundays ago, I mentioned Elijah in passing. When Jezebel sought to kill him, he sat down underneath a tree and said, "I have had enough Lord."

The Psalmist here in Psalm 123 reveals a bit of the roller coaster ride that life often is for us.

¹ Other ideas include: Psalms that reflect entering the Promised Land the first time, re-entering after Exile, correlating to the climb up the steps to the Temple (one Psalm for 15 steps), and/or figurative for the journey back to God.

Think about this sequence:

Psalm 120—In my distress, I called to the Lord. What misery in Meshech! I have lived too long with those who hate peace. It is a depressing hymn.

Psalm 121—The mood is better. I raise my eyes toward the mountains, where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 122—Now, his feet are standing in Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem, there is joy.

But Psalm 123—We are back to this experience of “I have had enough!”

Here is an important lesson right from the beginning of this text.

Powerful, awe-inspiring worship doesn't make all of your problems go away;
it just changes the perspective from which you view those problems.

This is why regular, habitual worship is so important in the life of the believer.

So, what are we to do when we have had enough? What does this Psalm teach?

Give it to God

- In light of His Position

A few weeks ago, we saw a similar expression in Psalm 121. In Psalm 121, God is the one who is the maker of heaven and earth. We said about that wonderful expression that it is not the size of our problem that is the issue, but the size of our God. The one who is our helper is the one who made heaven and earth. I saw this week something that said, “Instead of telling God how big your problem is, tell your problem how big your God is.”

Equally true and equally comforting is the description of God here in 123. “He is the One enthroned in Heaven.”

You probably learned to say the Lord's Prayer like this, “Our Father, who art in Heaven...” Standard English would better translate this phrase, “Our Father who is in Heaven.” That's the idea of this line of the Psalm.

Someone told me about a preacher who began his sermon:

Tonight I wanted my subject to be “God is Love.” However, I have since decided that love is too big of a topic, so I wanted my subject to be just “God is.” Then, I decided that I do not have time to describe who God is. Therefore, my subject tonight is just “is.”

I am told that for nearly an hour that preacher talked all about “is.”

Understanding “is” impacts our praying. The use of a form of “is” was how God revealed Himself to Moses. Remember, God said, *I Am Who I Am.*” (Exodus 3:14 NIV) In the same way, John, in Revelation, indicated that the continual worship of God goes like this:

*Holy, holy, holy
Is the Lord God Almighty,
Who was, and is, and is to come.* (Revelation 4:8 NIV)

How does this revelation and remembrance of God guide our praying? First, because God is, He is present. Second, the simple use of “is” also reflects that God is beyond description. The greatest theologian cannot communicate God in all of His fullness. We, by faith, must accept simply that “He is.” Third, because God is, we know that He is eternal. Because He is, a day does not exist when He is not.

When things look bad, when it looks like the wrong people are in charge, just remember that “God is enthroned in Heaven.”

- In light of Our Place

Verse 2 indicates our place. What are we to make of this analogy of servant? He is God, and we are not. He is on His throne and we are not. He is the One in control and we are not. We are to look to Him with priority and expectation.

- In light of our Predicament

The predicament for the Psalmist is scorn and the arrogance of the proud. We can only speculate on what specific event the Psalmist was referring. But, here is what we do know. They couldn’t do anything about it. And, one of life’s biggest and hardest lessons that we must learn is that most times we cannot do anything about those problems that are most difficult for us. That is why we must give them to God.

At the heart of this Psalm is a lesson about prayer. There are so many elements of prayer in this Psalm. In prayer, we focus on God, not our problems. In prayer, we express our helplessness. In prayer, we cry out to God for mercy. In prayer, we struggle. And ultimately, in prayer, we submit to God.

Trust in God

- For What? His Favor

God’s favor is the undeserved mercy of God. Simply put, God’s favor is His grace in all things. Now, the New Testament says that His grace is sufficient in all things.

But, I want you to think about one other detail of God’s favor. Though undeserved, God’s favor seems to rest on those who seek Him. Second Chronicles 16:9 is one of my life’s most cherished verses. “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are completely His.” We open ourselves up to the blessing and favor of God by our seeking Him, His will, and obeying Him.

King Asa's life, the context of this verse, reflects this. When he sought God, he received God's favor. When he did not, he lost God's favor.

- How long? Forever

How long do we trust God? As long as it takes—"until He shows us favor."

Our children learned this week in VBS that Jesus knows, Jesus sees, and Jesus saves.

I find comfort and confidence in knowing that He knows. In the Old Testament, the people of God were crying and groaning about their treatment in Egypt. The Bible says, "God saw the Israelites, and He took notice." (Exodus 2:25) When God met Moses at the burning bush, He said, "I have observed the misery of My people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors, and I know about their suffering." (Exodus 3:7) If God knew then don't you think that He knows today?

He knows about all the things that plague our world. He knows about ISIS. He knows about the economy. He knows about the Presidential election. And He knows your bank account, and your family, and your chart at your Doctor's office. He knows. And, He is not in a panic. There is no panic button in Heaven. He is on His throne.

We don't have to say enough, because God eventually will say enough.

Conclusion: I think one of the biggest temptations when we feel overwhelmed is to feel more overwhelmed because we know we should not feel this way. This actually leads to our stress. We begin to think that if we had more faith we shouldn't feel this way. So, be encouraged by Elijah's story.

Let me tell you a story or remind you of a story. When Jesus went up to what we now call the Mount of Transfiguration. He took Peter, James, and John went with Him. The Bible says that Jesus was transfigured—his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white. Then the Bible says that two Old Testament figures appeared that with them. The two? Moses and Elijah. It must be that even the seemingly overwhelmed can be used by God. The key is, like Elijah and the worshippers of Psalm 123, we must look up.

One commentator called this Psalm, "A Psalm of the Eyes." He explained, "Our eyes are inclined to go downward, and inward, anywhere but to the Lord." And so, we must continue to look upward.

There is nothing better to do than go to God humbly. There is nothing better to ask than for His favor.