

THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

JOURNEYING WITH JESUS
TO JERUSALEM

Part 4

"Psalm 123 & the Parable of the Pharisee & the Tax Collector"

2 February 2025

Introduction: *Basil of Caesarea on Humility*

"The surest salvation for him, the remedy of his ills, and the means of restoration to his original state is in practicing humility and not pretending that he may lay claim to any glory through his own efforts but seeking it from God...What truly exalts a person...[is] to know in truth what is great and to cling to it, and to seek the glory which comes from the Lord of Glory."

—Basil of Caesarea, *On Doctrine & Practice*

Key Point: As the _____ of the Lord, we are recipients of His mercy and can therefore be characterized by _____ before both Him and others.

Psalm 123

The ascent psalms continue with the Israelite and his companions in the temple raising their eyes in worship to the Lord who sits enthroned in heaven and asking for His mercy to be upon them.

- **The pilgrim and his companions look to the Lord in prayer as they wait for Him to intervene mercifully on their behalf. (v. 1-2)**

Psa. 123:1-2—¹ *To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!* ² *Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us.*

⇒ The language emphasizes the _____ nature of his prayer which is directed towards the Lord.

"I lift up my eyes"

⇒ The imagery used of the Lord emphasizes His _____ power over all things.

"you who are enthroned in the heavens"

⇒ The imagery of male and female servants and masters is used to describe how the pilgrim and his companions understand their _____ to the Lord.

"eyes"

"hand"

*"Thus, the idea of the "eyes" looking to the Lord as illustrated with these figures represents giving full attention in prayer to the Lord. Their prayers are complemented by their eager expectation of the Lord's answer."—Alan Ross, *The Psalms**

⇒ They will look continuously to the Lord until He provides their longed for _____.

"till he has mercy upon us"

"mercy"—ḥānan—to be gracious or show favor or pity. The favor that is primarily in view is that which is undeserved.

- **Their prayer is for the Lord in His mercy to deliver them from the contempt of the unbelieving world. (v. 3-4)**

Psa. 123:3-4—³ *Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.* ⁴ *Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.*

⇒ The prayer becomes a _____ as the psalmist speaks of the humiliation they have experienced.

"contempt"—bûz—contempt that springs from evil. It carries the idea of being disrespected, despised, or shamed.

"scorn"—la'aḡ—mocking, derision, scoffing

"In the psalms, contempt is often verbal ridicule, but occasionally persecution and mistreatment."—Alan Ross

"more than enough"

⇒ Two kinds of people are mentioned as those responsible for this mistreatment:
"those who are at ease" "the proud"

Key Point: Rightly understanding our relationship to the Lord allows us to turn to Him in _____ even as we experience the contempt of the world around us.

Gospel Parallel: "The Parable of the Pharisee & the Tax Collector" — Luke 18:9-14

Background: The Lord Jesus told this parable towards the end of His journey to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Along the way, He was accompanied by His followers, but interacted with various other individuals and groups. His miracles affirmed His authority as Messiah and His teaching further explained the salvation of God which He had come to bring.

1. The parable was directed at a particular group within the wider audience that heard it.

(A) They viewed _____ a particular way: "[they] trusted in themselves that they were righteous"

(B) They viewed _____ another way: "[they] treated others with contempt"

"contempt" — exoutheneō — to show by one's attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth; to disdain

2. The setting of the parable was the _____ court, likely at the time of one of the feasts.

3. The parable focuses on two men who held very different positions in 1st Cent. Judean society.

(A) A _____

(B) A _____ (Publican)

4. Their prayers demonstrated how they understood both the Lord and themselves.

⇒ The Pharisee approached the Lord with the understanding of himself in comparison to others:

Luke 18:11b-12—'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

⇒ The Tax Collector approached the Lord with an understanding of himself in comparison to God's _____.

Luke 18:13—But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

"be merciful" — hilaskomai — to cause to be favorably inclined or disposed; to propitiate, conciliate.

Key Point: True humility before the Lord involves looking to Him as the _____ judge of all rather than exalting ourselves in comparison with others.

Concluding Thoughts

1. Knowing Christ means that we can humbly _____ the Lord in the mercy that He provides.

Heb. 4:16—Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

2. Knowing Christ means that we can be _____ with His humility as we relate to others.

1 Pet. 5b-6—Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you

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Key Point: As the servants of the Lord, we are recipients of His mercy and can therefore be characterized by humility before both Him and others.

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