

Lesson 131
Psalm 123

I. Introduction

- A. Spurgeon called this Psalm 123 a "Psalm of the Eyes." The old ancient commentators called it "Oculus Sperans" or the eye of hope! It is a prayer of the Hebrews while they are under foreign oppression. MacArthur, in his comments on the Psalm, says "it fits well during the days of Nehemiah when Israel was rebuilding the wall." (Nehemiah 1:3, 2:19)
- B. Martin Luther says "this Psalm is but short, and therefore a very fit example to show the force of prayer not to consist in many words, but in fervency of spirit. For great and weighty matters may be comprised in a few words, if they proceed from the Spirit and the unspeakable groanings of the heart, especially when necessity is such as will not suffer any long prayer."
- C. It is a Psalm of faith, where the humble Psalmist asks God to have mercy on him and his people, and to help them "cope" with those who disdain them and hold them in contempt!
- D. It is a Psalm of ascent because the Psalmist moves from looking to the hills, which represent where God has chosen to abide in Jerusalem, to God Himself, who dwelleth in the heavens!

II. Eyes, and what they represent. (v1,2)

- A. The eyes represent the state of the heart which fixes desire, hope, confidence, and expectation upon the Lord. (Spurgeon) The eyes have been called the "window of the soul." The Hebrew word for eye is ayin, the sixteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (Psalm 119:123) There are multiple uses for the word eyes in Hebrew as evidence by the 887 occurrences in the O.T. alone! It can be: (1) anthropomorphic (Ps 33:18, 34:15, 2Chron 16:9; Ezekial 1:18) (2) figure for mental, spiritual faculties (Gen 3:5,7; Is 6:9-10, 42:7; Matt 13:15,16; Luke 10:23, 24:16, 24:31; 2 Cor 4:4-6)
- B. Faithful heart. The Psalmist sees the unseen, looks afar off to the promises! Thomas Manton famously said, "the lifting of the eyes, implies faith and confident persuasion that God is ready and willing to help us. Faith will draw comfort not only from that which is invisible, but also from that which is future as well as invisible; its supports lie in the other world, and in things which are yet to come." (Heb 11:1-3,6,13-16,24-27)
- C. Humble heart. In this context, the Psalmist willfully acknowledges: (1) He looks to God alone. The true measure of a humble heart is when one understands his inability to help himself and his total dependence upon God. God hears the prayer of a contrite heart, (Lev 26:40-42; Ps 51:17; Is 57:15-21) but He does not hear the prayer of the proud! (Lev 26:19; Psalm 50:16-23; James 4:6-10; 1 Pet 5:5-7) The Psalmist gladly says, "You who dwell in the heavens." This phrase represents an awareness that God is sovereign over him, omnipotent to help him, transcendent in time and space for him, ruling over him in permanent authority!
- D. Two examples of humility. (v2)
 - 1. Servants looking to the hand of their masters. The word is slave. A slave had no rights, save only to please his master! A slave could not provide for himself, could not function in society without his master's approval or authority. In the days this was written the culture was different, very unfamiliar to us. The Masters did not speak to their servants frequently, often they motioned with their hands when they wanted something done. "The slaves stood silent at the bottom of the rooms, with their hands crossed over their breasts, with their eyes fixed on their master, they seek to anticipate every one of his wishes." (Perowne, "Letters on Egypt")
 - 2. Maids looking to the hands of her mistress. The women, who ruled over their "housekeepers" were much more vocal than the men. The servants were issued many commands and were more prone to punishment. (Spurgeon)
 - 3. Application to the church. We are God's slaves. (doulos) We are bought with the precious blood of Jesus, and we are not our own. Our greatest ambition is to satisfy our Master in obedience, as we display gratitude for His work of redemption as we are freed from the bondage of sin and liberated to be "children of the King." We must die daily, by the Spirit, to our own desires and wants and anticipate what He wants for us! (1 Cor 6:15-20, 7:22-23; Rom 8:13; Gal 2:20)

III. Mercy asked for relief from contempt! (v3,4)

- A. We ask perseveringly. The phrase, in verse 2c, until He has mercy, may anticipate a long wait! Waiting is a virtue from the Spirit that produces much fruit. (Ps 37:7-8, 34-36, 40:1, 62:1,5-7; Is 40:31; Luke 18:1-8)
- B. We ask for mercy. The word is hanan in the Hebrew. It means to show favor, be gracious to, take pity towards, show us compassion! (Ps 103:8-14) This is who the LORD is, a merciful and gracious God!
- C. We are filled with contempt! The connotation is that the nation was filled with contempt and could manage no more. The nation was being scorned, ridiculed, mocked, insulted, scoffed at, disdained. They were experiencing shame and feeling despised! (Ps 57:1-7; 71:20, 55:16-22)
- D. Who holds them in contempt? The Psalmist says it is those who are at ease and those who are proud! (Ps 73:3-16)
- E. Application to the church?