

SERVITUDE**Psalm 123****June 14, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

The opening line of John Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion* reads, "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost in its entirety of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."¹ This Psalm reflects that truth. It teaches us that true comfort and peace lies in the hands of the Almighty God in whom we can rely at all times. However, our confidence must not be presumptuous. The psalmist shows us that only those who seek and serve God should expect His mercy in their lives. In other words, God's mercy demands our faithfulness *to Him*.

"**To You**" are important words for us to grasp as we consider Psalm 123. This pilgrim began his ascent to Jerusalem, which our progress as pilgrim's echoes, lamenting his surroundings in Psalm 120. Then with words similar to the opening of 123, he acknowledges in 121, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains" and ponders whether his help might come from the hills. There he finds nothing but idolatry, and his confidence quickly flies to God for his provision. After arriving at the gates of Jerusalem (122) and celebrating together with the people of God, he goes straight to the throne of God. His goal is not Jerusalem, or even the temple of Jerusalem, as important as they were in God's economy of that place where God was with His people. But it is to the God of Jerusalem, the God of His people, that one must go to look for help and guidance here on this earth.

I. Focus on God (123:1-2)

The first thing the psalm teaches us is that we always ought to focus on God. We should be ever lifting up our eyes. Here is a man who knows the majesty of God: "The LORD reigns and is clothed with majesty," the psalmist says in Psalm 93:1. "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised," he says in Psalm 48:1.

One writer describes this majesty, "The word 'majesty' incorporates such concepts as authority, dignity and reverence. But like so many other examples we could think of, the perception of God conveyed by the term 'majesty' is not as obviously implanted in our minds as it should be. Do you think of God's majesty as you prepare for church each Sunday? Are you thinking of His majesty—His power, His royal character, His stateliness—as you hear the Call to Worship and hear God's presence invoked in prayer? God's majesty should be the first thing on our minds when we gather for worship. It is that majesty, that quality of God which separates Him from us that obligates us to worship Him and to pray to Him and to sing to Him and to give heed to His Word. It is that quality of majesty that allows us to see this world for what it is and still have hope; it is that quality of majesty that leads us to appear humbly before God knowing that we are here only by His mercy."²

The psalmist is a worshiper fixing his thoughts, his focus, on the God whom he knows to be King, the God whom he knows to be sovereign and in control; who is infinite and eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, and power, and holiness, and justice, and goodness and truth (as the Confessions rightly assert). And yet the psalmist knows that God desires to be the sole

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 37.

² James Borwine, ThD, sermon on Psalm 123.

focus of all our attentions. **“To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!”**

1. Initial look (v. 1)

John 1:29: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Spurgeon testimony – Is. 45:22, “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is* no other” (NKJV). ‘My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, ‘Look.’ Now lookin’ don’t take a deal of pains. It ain’t liftin’ your foot or your finger; it is just, ‘Look.’ Well, a man needn’t go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn’t be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Ay!” said he, in broad Essex, “Many on ye are lookin’ to yourselves, but it’s no use lookin’ there. You’ll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Some on ye say, ‘We must wait for the Spirit’s workin’.’ You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, ‘Look unto Me.’ Then the good man followed up his text in this way:—”Look unto Me; I am sweatin’ great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin’ on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin’ at the Father’s right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!”³

2. Constant look (v. 2)

Slave/master analogy – for guidance and provision.

What the psalmist describes then are the eyes of faith, a faith that begins with God and ends with God, trusting that He will both direct according to His will and provide for His children.

Hebrews 12:1-3 – ¹ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

“So our eyes *look* to the LORD our God, until He is gracious to us.”

II. Clarity of Self (123:3-4)

1. **They knew their circumstances – CONTEMPT!** However, they plead God’s mercy.

Habakkuk – how he began and how he ended.

³ http://www.preceptaustin.org/c_h_spurgeon%27s_testimony.htm, accessed 06/13/2009.

Habakkuk 3:2-4 – ² LORD, I have heard the report about You *and* I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; ***in wrath remember mercy.*** ³ God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. ⁴ *His* radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays *flashing* from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.

Habakkuk 3:18-19 – ¹⁸ Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*, and makes me walk on my high places.

Eugene Petersen – The prayer is not an attempt to get God to do what he is unwilling, otherwise, to do, but a reaching out to what we know that he does do, an expressed longing to receive what God is doing in and for us in Jesus Christ. In obedience we pray *have mercy upon us* instead of “give us what we want.” We pray *have mercy upon us* and not “reward us for our goodness so our neighbors will acknowledge our superiority.” We pray *have mercy upon us* and not “punish us for our badness so we feel better.” We pray *have mercy upon us* and not “be nice to us because we have been such good people.”⁴

In other words, we are to approach God pleading His mercy *humbly*.

Note: They did not ask for deliverance, but mercy.

2. They knew their enemies

Where did these enemies come from?

Deuteronomy 7:1-13 – ¹ When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, ² and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. ³ Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. ⁴ For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. ⁵ But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their *sacred* pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire. ⁶ For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; ¹⁰ but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him,

⁴ Eugene Petersen, *A long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 60.

He will repay him to his face. ¹¹ Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them. ¹² Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers.”

Note: They did not ask for deliverance, but mercy.

Exodus 34:6-7 – ⁶ “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

A.W. Pink – “Mercy... denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures. Thus ‘mercy’ presupposes sin.”⁵

Which brings us to our greatest need, our greatest enemy from which we should plead God’s mercy. As the comic strip Pogo puts it, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” Our greatest enemy is our sin. The war we encounter daily is between flesh and Spirit. Paul describes the battle.

Romans 7:14-21 – ¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

This enemy has been defeated already! We have already been set free from the bondage of sin. Sin no longer should have any power over us. It was buried with Christ, therefore we are no longer slaves of sin. Sin is not our master!

Romans 8:12-13— So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Ephesians 2:4-7 – ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁵ Quoted by James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 3. 1092.

Hebrews 4:16 – Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Conclusion

1. It is not enough to go to church.

2. In spite of the vast difference between us and God, and in spite of the fact that our view of God is probably unworthy of His greatness, *He still shows us His favor.*

3. Are you actively killing your sin.

I wish I could live with You in view;
Eyes to Your glory
Ears to Your wisdom
Heart for Your grace.
But I live with me in view.
Eyes to my kingdom
Ears for my opinion
Heart captured by my will.
I know I was made for You,
I know that Hope, Meaning, Purpose, Identity,
My agenda for every day,
Is to be found in You.
But I want my own kingdom
I love my own glory
I define my own meaning
I delight in my control.
I know You are not fooled
By my burnt offerings.
There's a war that never ends;
The battleground is my heart.
It's a moral skirmish
Between what You've ordained
And what I want.
So I don't find pleasure in Your glory,
I don't delight in Your law.
But my heart doesn't rest;
I know there's a better way.
I know You are God
And I am not...
Help me to see, to acknowledge, to weep
And say, "Against You, and You only have I sinned
And done evil in Your sight."
And then help me to rest
In your mercy

In Your faithful love,
Even as the war goes on.⁶

⁶ Paul David Tripp, *Whiter Than Snow*, 59-60.