

Psalm 123: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 22 December 2020

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[0 : 00] Psalm 123, A Song of Ascents Psalm 123 is a short pilgrim psalm or song of ascent.

It begins with an expression of trust before moving to a prayer to the Lord. Faced with the contempt, derision and scorn of those who were at ease, the psalmist and his company seek the Lord and his grace and mercy in their situation.

As a work of poetry, the psalm is carefully strung together by repeated elements. John Goldingay describes this in terms of a terrorist parallelism, binding the whole together. My eyes and our eyes in verses 1 and verse 2E, like the eyes in verse 2A and 2C, hand in verses 2B and 2D, the pairing of servants and maid, and of towards their master's hand and towards her mistress's hand in verse 2, the inclusion of toward you, you who sit in the heavens, and toward Yahweh our God in verses 1 and 2F, gracious in verses 2G and 3A, become so full in verses 3B and 4A, and shame in verses 3B and 4C.

The key image of the psalm is concerned with the direction of the eyes. The eyes of the worshipper's hearts are drawn to the Lord who is enthroned in the heavens, and the psalmist compares this to the way that the eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters or mistresses. The relationship between the servant and their master or mistress is a relationship of obedience and service. It is also one of dependence. The master or mistress have the duty to provide for their servant.

[2 : 09] The servant looks to the hand of their master or mistress for the slightest gesture or indication of what they ought to be doing. The servant also looks to the hand of their master or mistress for everything that they need to survive.

By the use of this imagery, used to develop the notion of the direction of the worshipper's attention, the relationship between God and his people is presented as one of service and obedience and dependence on the one side, and on the other side provision, rule and vindication.

In the very fact that the one enthroned in the heavens is the master of the one who comes as his worshipper, that worshipper can find comfort and assurance in the Lord's commitment and justice in providing for them.

Thank you.