

PSALM 123

This psalm was penned at a time then the church of God was brought low and trampled upon; some think it was when the Jews were captives in Babylon, though that was not the only time that they were insulted over by the proud. The psalmist begins as if he spoke for himself only (v. 1), but presently speaks in the name of the church. Here is,

- I. Their expectation of mercy from God (v. 1, 2).
- II. Their plea for mercy with God, (v. 3, 4). In singing it we must have our eye up to God's favour with a holy concern, and then an eye down to men's reproach with a holy contempt.

~~123~~ PSALM 123:1-4

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A song of degrees.

We have here,

I. The solemn profession which God's people make of faith and hope in God, v. 1, 2. Observe,

1. The title here given to God: *O thou that dwellest in the heavens*. Our Lord Jesus has taught us, in prayer, to have an eye to God as *our Father in heaven*; not that he is confined there, but there especially he manifests his glory, as the King in his court. Heaven is a place of prospect and a place of power; he that dwells there beholds thence all the calamities of his people and thence can send to save them. Sometimes God seems to have forsaken the earth, and the enemies of God's people ask, *Where is now your God?* But then they can say with comfort, *Our God is in the heavens*. *O thou that sittest in the heavens* (so some), sittest as Judge there; for *the Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens*, and to that throne injured innocency may appeal.

2. The regard here had to God. The psalmist himself *lifted up his eyes* to him. The eyes of a good man are *ever towards the Lord*, ~~125~~ Psalm 25:15.

In every prayer we lift up our soul, the eye of our soul, to God, especially in trouble, which was the case here. The *eyes* of the people *waited on the Lord*, v. 2. We find mercy coming towards a people *when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, are towards the Lord*, ^{<391>}Zechariah 9:1. The eyes of the body are heaven-ward. *Os homini sublime dedit* — *To man he gave an erect mien*, to teach us which way to direct the eyes of the mind. *Our eyes wait on the Lord*, the eye of desire and prayer, the begging eye, and the eye of dependence, hope, and expectation, the longing eye. Our eyes must wait upon God as *the Lord*, and *our God*, *until that he have mercy upon us*. We desire mercy from him, we hope he will show us mercy, and we will continue our attendance on him till the mercy come. This is illustrated (v. 2) by a similitude: Our eyes are to God *as the eyes of a servant, and handmaid, to the hand of their master and mistress*. The eyes of a servant are,

- (1.) To his master's directing hand, expecting that he will appoint him his work, and cut it out for him, and show him how he must do it. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*
- (2.) To his supplying hand. Servants look to their master, or their mistress, for their portion of meat in due season, ^{<395>}Proverbs 31:15. And to God must we look for daily bread, for grace sufficient; from him we must receive it thankfully.
- (3.) To his assisting hand. If the servant cannot do his work himself, where must he look for help but to his master? And in the strength of the Lord God we must go forth and go on.
- (4.) To his protecting hand. If the servant meet with opposition in his work, if he be questioned for what he does, if he be wronged and injured, who should bear him out and right him, but his master that set him on work? The people of God, when they are persecuted, may appeal to their Master, *We are thine; save us*.
- (5.) To his correcting hand. If the servant has provoked his master to beat him, he does not call for help against his master, but looks at the hand that strikes him, till it shall say, "It is enough; I will not contend for ever." The people of God were now under his rebukes; and whither should they turn but to him that *smote them?* ^{<293>}Isaiah 9:13. To whom should they make supplication but to their Judge? They will not do as Hagar did, who ran away from her mistress when she put some hardships upon her

(¹¹⁶⁶Genesis 16:6), but they submit themselves to and humble themselves under God's mighty hand.

(6.) To his rewarding hand. The servant expects his wages, his *well-done*, from his master. Hypocrites have their eye to the world's hand; thence *they have their reward* (⁴⁰⁶²Matthew 6:2); but true Christians have their eye to God as their rewarder.

II. The humble address which God's people present to him in their calamitous condition (v. 3, 4), wherein,

1. They sue for mercy, not prescribing to God what he shall do for them, nor pleading any merit of their own why he should do it for them, but, *Have mercy upon us, O Lord! have mercy upon us.* We find little mercy with men; their *tender mercies are cruel*; there are *cruel mockings*. But this is our comfort, that *with the Lord there is mercy* and we need desire no more to relieve us, and make us easy, than the mercy of God. Whatever the troubles of the church are, God's mercy is a sovereign remedy.

2. They set forth their grievances: *We are exceedingly filled with contempt.* Reproach is the wound, the burden, they complain of. Observe,

(1.) Who were reproached: "We, who have our eyes up to thee." Those who are owned of God are often despised and trampled on by the world. Some translate the words which we render, *those that are at ease*, and *the proud*, so as to signify the persons that are scorned and contemned. "Our soul is troubled to see how those that are at peace, and the excellent ones, are scorned and despised." The saints are a peaceable people and yet are abused (¹⁸⁵⁰Psalm 35:20), the excellent ones of the earth and yet undervalued, (²⁰⁰¹Lamentations 4:1, 2).

(2.) Who did reproach them. Taking the words as we read them, they were the epicures who lived at ease, carnal sensual people, (¹⁸¹⁵Job 12:5). The scoffers are such as walk after their own lusts and serve their own bellies, and the proud such as set God himself at defiance and had a high opinion of themselves; they trampled on God's people, thinking they magnified themselves by vilifying them.

(3.) To what degree they were reproached: "*We are filled*, we are surfeited with it. *Our soul is exceedingly filled with it.*" The enemies thought they could never jeer them enough, nor say enough to make them despicable;

and they could not but lay it to heart; it was a sword in their bones,
~~420~~ Psalm 42:10. Note,

[1.] Scorning and contempt have been, and are, and are likely to be, the lot of God's people in this world. Ishmael mocked Isaac, which is called *persecuting* him; and so it is now, ~~420~~ Galatians 4:29.

[2.] In reference to the scorn and contempt of men it is matter of comfort that there is mercy with God, mercy to our good names when they are barbarously used. *Hear, O our God! for we are despised.*