

Confidence and Concerns

Psalm 123

In this Psalm, that God's people sang together in connection with their annual ascents to Jerusalem, the Psalmist laments the scorn he suffers. As God's people sang this Psalm, they expressed their same experience of facing contempt because of their devotion to God.

This song, however, begins with the Psalmist confessing his confidence in God as he lives among people who are hostile to his faith. It is in lifting-up his eyes to the LORD that he is strengthened as he lives in a culture that is hostile to his commitments and convictions. He looks upon and unto the One who is enthroned in the heavens. This look, however, is "not a brief glance, but a steady, reflective and adoring gaze." It is essential for God's people to gaze upon God for the courage and comfort needed to live in this world. How long and how often do you lift up your eyes to the LORD each day? Someone has suggested that God's people should look long at the beginning of each day and often throughout the rest of each day. Now that Jesus has come, we should look up to him, who is enthroned in heaven. He inaugurated God's kingdom on earth and will one day return to establish his kingdom fully on earth. Paul wrote, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord (Christ), are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." (2 Cor. 3:18) Someone has said that we become what we behold, based on this verse. It is as believers behold the glory of Jesus, the King, that we are changed into his likeness and are strengthened, though we are scorned. We should look to the Lord as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master and as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, confidently depending on God only and completely for the mercy we need.

Looking and praying for mercy, through singing this Psalm, God's people were suggesting something about their condition under their circumstances that were of great concern. They certainly asked for mercy because their souls were grieved by suffering because of the contempt they faced. Mercy is what we ask for when we are suffering. In Jesus' parable, the good Samaritan was the neighbor to the man robbed and beaten and is referred to as the one who showed mercy. God's people continue to suffer at the hands of the prosperous and the proud and seek the mercy of God in His relieving their grief. Also, they probably asked for mercy because their souls were guilty of sin. While mercy was sought when there was suffering, it was even more often sought when there was sin. It is easy when God's people are sinned against to be affected in a way that results in them sinning. When God's people are persecuted, there are basically two kinds of temptations to sin that believers face from opposite directions. There is the temptation that we would be intimidated and capitulate to the culture around us. In doing this, we would in fear, disown what they scorn. The most relevant example of this in our day has to do with what the Bible says about human sexuality and sexual immorality. Our culture is full of contempt toward those who hold a biblical view on this range of issues. Some, because of the pressure, have disowned what Scripture says on this because it is so scorned. The other temptation we face is that we would be infuriated and retaliate, as we hold to what the Bible says. Instead, we are to suffer as Jesus did, "when he was reviled did not revile in return." God's people should not respond to persecution in fear or in anger. Beholding Jesus, a believer becomes more and more like Him, who was full of grace (not responding with anger as he owns what the world scorns) and full of truth (not responding in fear as he disowns what the world scorns).

When anyone sins, the good news is that Jesus' death on the cross was the fulfillment of what the Old Covenant mercy-seat foretold. When a Jew would sing this Psalm seeking mercy, he or she would have probably thought first and most about the mercy-seat. It was the lid of the ark of the covenant that was in the Holy of Holies. The high priest would put the blood of the atoning sacrifice on the mercy-seat on the day of atonement and God's people would be forgiven of their sins. Jesus's death was what this sacrifice pointed to and brings the mercy of forgiveness to those who repent and trust in his sacrifice for their sins. Thank God for Jesus, our mercy-seat!