

February 2, 2025

Psalm 123

*Where are your eyes?* My dad would ask that whenever I struck out in little league, because I'd take my eye off the baseball and look to that spot over the fence where I was going to hit the ball, and then miss the ball by a mile. *Where are your eyes?* Teachers for the past fifteen years have had to ask this to their students who can't seem to take their eyes off of some unknown electronic device that they think is completely unnoticeable under their desk. Where are your eyes? The wives who try (and fail) to have a conversation with their husbands during Sunday Night Football know that it doesn't matter what they're talking about, whether she should get a haircut or whether their child needs surgery, eventually the husband's eyes are going to drift toward the game and she's going to start hearing "Yeah, okay, uh-huh." Your eyes are vital in the interpersonal communication process. Wherever your eyes are, that's where your focus is. This is the idea that the writer of Psalm 123 is trying to get across. That your eyes not only play a role in where your focus is physically, but spiritually. **Where are your eyes?**

### **Verse 1. Where are they looking?**

Two weeks ago we talked about the question in Psalm 121, "Where does my help come from," and however you answer that question, that truly is your God. This Psalm is using "eye" language to do something similar, to describe how the heart identifies its god. Wherever your eyes are, that is your god. We talked about this two weeks ago, but this is something we easily forget. Where are your eyes during times of trouble? When you feel insecure, ashamed, confused, humiliated, depressed, where do your eyes go for assurance? Where do you look for hope? For joy? For love? You are likely very tempted to look to your career, your money, your children and your skills as a parent, or your success, or your moral character. You might think, "I'm hurt, I'm ashamed, but as long as I have my job, as long as I have my great marriage, as long as I'm a good parent and a good person, or at least a better person than those people over there." Wherever your eyes are, functionally, that is your god. You see, sin often isn't loving bad things; it's loving good things too much! That's usually the cause of sin. People steal or scam others because they think, as long as they have money, they'll be okay, but no money is ever enough. People cheat on their spouses because they've made romantic feelings or sexual fulfillment their god, and as soon as their spouse doesn't fulfill them, they go searching elsewhere. This is why people get so nasty about politics and the president- their god is their country, or their version of it, and those they see as a threat to it are their enemies and subject to verbal abuse and insults. And when one idol doesn't give you the assurance, joy, and security that you crave, you become angry and bitter and hopeless and bounce to another. As our eyes bounce from one idol to another and nothing works, your Father, the creator of all those things looks down at you and says, "Look at me! Look at me and live! Look at me- I can give you what you need!" When we look to the Father, we see where his eyes have been since before he created the world- on us. As we see the Son and go to his cross, we see his eyes focus on us. As we see the Son resurrect and rule over all things for us, we see that when we look at him, his eyes meet ours and we realize the words of St Augustine. "You created me for yourself, and my heart is restless until it finds its rest in you."

### **Verse 2. How are they looking?**

We've established where our eyes have to go. But this psalm continues and asks a question almost as equally important: How do you look at him? When you look at God, when you go to him in prayer, when you focus on him, how do you see yourself in relation to him? Look at your prayers and find out... When you pray, do you say, "God, if you give me this, I'll do this?" That's bargaining. Do you say, "God, I've been really good and really trying to make you happy. Can you please just do this one thing for me?" That's demanding. Do you think to yourself, "well, maybe if I say this prayer, maybe if I give extra money, maybe if I behave myself, then God will give me what I really want?" That's confusing God for a vending machine. We all have, and it's wrong and radically foolish. What could we possibly offer to God that he would need? God doesn't need anything from us. He doesn't owe us a thing. There's nothing we could do to earn a thing from him. We can't approach God as our equal because he's not. He's our master. We have nothing, literally nothing to offer him. The only way we could ever approach him like a slave approaches his master. With fear. With our heads on the ground, not trying to bargain with him as if we have anything to offer. Do you know who you're talking to? You're talking to the king. You're talking to the holy God of the universe! Know your place! *At the same time, know your place.* He may be a king, but you're his child! Beg! Yes, beg! But beg with confidence. There is nothing you can ask from him that he can't give to you. There's no request that's too large. And while you beg, while you fix your eyes on his hand and beg with confidence. But for what?

### **Verse 3. What are they looking for?**

We've asked, "where are your eyes- God, or somewhere else?" We've asked, "how are you looking, like a slave, or his equal?" Now this Psalm compels us to ask, "What are our eyes looking for?" You can tell a lot about yourself by what you pray for. You can see what you truly care about. Sometimes, you can even see who your god really is. If all you ask is, "God, please make me happy. Please make me healthy. Please make me wealthy and prosperous. Please let this person like me. Please give me this, this, and that," do you see what's wrong? Those things might be your god, and you're using God as a way to get them. Ironically, when we do that, the problem isn't that we're asking too much; but for far too little.

The greatest and most expensive, costly thing you can ask from God is this: "Have mercy on me." Why? Because when you ask God to have mercy on you, you are asking the God of infinite justice, who must punish sin and evil, and therefore you, to take that justice out on someone else. You are saying, "God, be good to me, bless me, save me, restore me, help me be with me not because I'm any good, but because I'm evil. Not because I'm beautiful, but because I'm ugly. Not because I have anything to offer, but only because you love me." You are acknowledging that you deserve nothing but eternal punishment, and putting every ounce of your trust on the hope that God won't give it to you. *God absolutely loves it when you do that.* Because when that is what you ask for, you are holding him to his promises and showing that you take what he says seriously. You are expressing your faith in the ultimate sacrifice, that Jesus Christ was perfect in your place, and was crushed in your place, and that you know that it was all for you and that if God would be willing to punish his own son so he could have mercy on you, then he will never forsake you or abandon you and he will answer your prayer. What could make God happier than that? That's why we say "God, have mercy" every Sunday in

Church. That's why this phrase, "Have mercy on us," is the quintessential phrase of what it means to be a Christian- because when you say, "God have mercy on us," you are lowering yourself before the mighty God of Heaven as a sinner and a slave, and you are also expressing your faith in his mercy, you are showing your confidence that he will give you mercy after mercy after mercy because of what his Son has done for you. Normally, we think that we should ask for mercy- and nothing more. Really, we should ask for mercy- and nothing less.

#### **Verse 4. Why are they looking?**

Now the psalm wants us to ask, "Why are my eyes looking for mercy?" In the context of this psalm, the Old Testament believers were being ridiculed, oppressed, abused, and even martyred for their faith in God. They go as far as to say that they are filled with it. They worship the true God at the cost of their dignity, their property, their safety, their loved ones, and their lives. Through this psalm, they are looking to the God of mercy to be who he is and have mercy on them. If that looks like deliverance from their oppressors, okay. If not, then God's mercy will reveal itself some other way. *What's your reason? Why are you asking God to be merciful today? Maybe it's because your family is broken. Maybe your marriage is failing. Maybe your body is falling apart and there's nothing the doctors can do to take away your pain. Maybe your heart has been crushed to the point where it's beyond mending. Maybe your past has haunted you to the point where you would rather die than live with your guilt and regret another day.* God's people will always have reasons to fall at his feet and beg for mercy. You do too. Tell him. Tell him your troubles. Lay it all at his feet. Does he already know? Yes. But that's not the point. He wants you to tell him. He wants you to pour out your soul to him. His eyes are on you. He's not distracted. He's listening and wants nothing more than for you to express your faith and trust and hope in him by telling him your troubles. As you tell him, know that just like a father feels the pain of his children, your Father feels your pain and weeps your tears. Know that your pain is not evidence of God's wrath. Remember that mercy won't always be in the form of happiness, wealth, health, or earthly blessings. That's ok. His mercy is yours, and he is yours, even when it hurts, and that it won't last forever. Because his final act of mercy will be to take you home, where your cries for mercy will turn into shouts of joy.

My final point is this: don't be surprised when arrogance and comfort don't mix with Christianity. Christianity is the only religion in existence where you have nothing to offer God, you earn nothing from God, and no one can bargain with God- when Martin Luther died, he had in his hand a little piece of paper on which he scribbled, "We are all beggars." This is what church is- a spiritual food pantry for beggars. Don't be surprised when Jesus and his message are ridiculed by the arrogant and the comfortable. The idea that our hearts are filled with evil probably isn't going to be acceptable to most modern Americans. The idea that God has called us to a life beyond physical or emotional comfort, that God might ask us to endure hardship and pain doesn't really mesh well with the American dream. Don't be surprised when people ridicule you for embracing a Jesus who saves you from sin- because they don't see the need for that. But also, don't be surprised when people's hearts are melted by the Gospel of Jesus. The message of Jesus suffering for you is often ridiculed, but it's also very powerful and liberating to those who can see how God owes them nothing, and yet has given them everything beyond imagination- mercy is powerful. Keep your eyes on God and his mercy. Amen.