

"Jesus Is Not Like That Rude Bartender In Star Wars"

Psalm 123:1-4

22 March 2020

Welcome to Grace! I'm so glad that you could join us online today. Yeah, this is kinda weird. Very weird, huh? But it looks like this is gonna be the new normal for a while, so we'll make the best of it.

I do want to say thank you to our tech team for working hard this past week to get this live stream up and running. They worked very hard and made it look easy. So thank you guys for loving Grace and using your gifts to serve this church. There may be some technical difficulties, perhaps. We might have some hiccups, so bear with us. And if that happens, as our old TV's used to say back in the day when these things happened, *please stand by*.

Okay. So, even though this is a little weird, we're gonna do what we normally do, okay? Open your Bibles to Psalm 123. We're taking a one-week break from 1 Kings today. Lord willing, we'll finish up 1 Kings next week, and I'm not sure if we'll start 2 Corinthians right away or not. This Coronavirus has thrown a kink into everybody's plans, right?

So Psalm 123 it is. This psalm has been resonating in my heart over the past week as things began unfolding. I just kept coming back to it. So I felt like we should turn to Psalm 123 today to help us deal with everything that's going on in our world right now. And our big idea today is this heart-thrilling good news-

JESUS LOVES DESPERATE PEOPLE.

He really does. Jesus loves desperate people. Isn't that great news? Are you desperate today? Listen, I've got some good news for you: Jesus loves when desperate people approach Him and ask for help.

So, this psalm is in the Bible so that you would know this about Jesus when you go through a pandemic: *Jesus welcomes desperate people*. This psalm was written for people who have to deal with the Coronavirus so that they would remember that Jesus loves to listen to desperate people. Jesus loves helping desperate people. It is not a burden to interrupt Him and cry for help. And that's exactly what the people in this psalm do. They cry out to Jesus to help them.

LOOK AT VERSE 1...

To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

We don't know who wrote this psalm, but Psalm 123 is one of the songs that ancient Israelites would sing as they made their journey to Jerusalem during their yearly festivals.

And the psalmist tells us right off the bat that his eyes are on Yahweh, on the Lord. And the first thing that we learn about the psalmist is this: *he is helpless*. He looks to God because he knows that he is powerless. He lifts his eyes up to the Lord, which is the appropriate response for any disciple, any day of their life, whether there's a Coronavirus going around or not.

To look to God and to lift up your eyes up to Him is an act of humility. To look to God is to grab your pride by the collar and drag it to your front door and throw it out on the street. To look to God is opening yourself up to the Holy Spirit and saying, *"Please knock the swagger out of me."* To look to God, like the psalmist does here, is to admit that you are not in control, and that you are powerless and helpless without Him.

And that's prayer at its essence, isn't it? Prayer is just acknowledging our helplessness. That's all that prayer is. Prayer is simply saying to Jesus, *"Look, Jesus. You and I both know that I like to mosey around under the false pretense that I'm the one in charge. But I'm here to tell to You that I'm ready to quit acting like a fool. I'm ready to admit that I am helpless. P.S. Will you please help me 'cause I'm really desperate?!"*

That's all that prayer is. It's embracing your helplessness and turning your eyes to Jesus, the only One who really can help you. Prayer is the way we slog through all of our troubles in life. We go to God. We lift our eyes up to Him. We tell Him all about what's happening in our lives. We tell Him about everything that's going on this little heart of ours.

And we do this knowing that Jesus is not opposed to helping us! It's not an inconvenience to Him! Jesus is not like a parent on their iPhone, as if He gets upset and yells at us because we interrupted Him as He was scrolling through *Instagram*. Jesus loves to be interrupted by and then intervene to save His people!

Jesus has invited us to just barge in and cry for help. And the psalmist has taken Yahweh up on this invitation. In fact, the first words of this psalm are "To you," which is emphatic in the Hebrew language.

The emphasis is on the LORD. "To you." Those 2 words remind us that it matters where you look. It matters where and who you hope in. It matters who you turn to in times of crisis. "To you!" What sweet words! In Hebrew, it's just one word- 2 words in English. But notice that there's movement with those 2 words. I am turning *to You*. I am going *to you*. I am not trusting in my wisdom, my thoughts, my speculations, my government...I am going *to You*, Jesus.

These 2 words are an invitation to us. They tell us that the door to God's office is always open! They tell us that we have a standing appointment with Jesus, anytime and anywhere! To you! There's no "social distancing" with Jesus! To you! Jesus doesn't do social distancing. *To you* I will barge in with the "Coronavirus-like symptoms" of my sin! To you I will run to with all of my fears and doubts and worries! To you!

Understand this, Grace: Jesus doesn't turn us away like the bartender at the Mos Eisley cantina in Star Wars. Do you know that scene? You have to know that scene or we can't be friends! I'm going to assume you know it, okay? Obi-Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker, along with the 2 droids, C-3PO and R2-D2, enter into a cantina, a bar, in the spaceport city of Mos Eisley. And when the bartender, a man named Wuher, sees the 2 droids, C-3PO and R2-D2, he says,

"Hey! We don't serve their kind here!...Your droids. They'll have to wait outside. We don't want them here."

Some people think Jesus is like that. Like you show up and He says, "I don't want your kind here." But that's not Jesus at all. He's not like that at all. Jesus says, "We serve your kind here! We serve all kinds of needy sinners. We serve the doubters, the fearful, the worried, the sick...the worried sick. We take everyone here. No shirt? No shoes? No problem! Come on in and bring all your baggage! We love people who have a lot of baggage!"

That's what those words "To you" are telling us today. In other words, "Welcome." They are the Old Testament version of Matthew 11-

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

There's the invitation right there. Jesus invites the weak, the weary, the downtrodden, the tired, the exhausted, the heavy laden, to come to Him and find rest. But you have to come empty-handed. Which means that you have to admit that you don't have it all together. You have to admit that you need help. You have to admit that you are helpless, that you are, indeed, a sinner.

But notice too that the psalmist here focuses on who God is in verse 1:

O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

Before he ever brings up what is happening in his life, the psalmist talks about who God is. Before he ever starts spilling the beans on what his troubles are, he recalibrates his heart by reminding himself that God rules over everything. That Jesus sits enthroned in Heaven above. I'm sure we don't do that as often as we like, do we? But what a difference it makes! To begin your prayers by reminding your soul that Jesus is not just enthroned, but that He is enthroned *in the heavens*, that will give you the perspective that you need as you deal with the Coronavirus and how it is upending all that we know in our world.

Biblical prayers seem to meditate on and mull over who God is more often than our prayers. Biblical prayers tend to spill more ink on God and who He is and what He is like than our prayers do. It's like they know something that we don't! They seem to know that when you begin your prayers by focusing on Jesus and who He is and what He has done, it has a way of changing everything, it has a way of calming your heart.

But notice too what God is doing here: *God is sitting down*. Did you catch that? He's not pacing the floor. He's not biting His nails. He's not tossing and turning. He's not calling the press to show up at the Rose Garden at 3 P.M. Eastern time so He can speak to the country. He's sitting down. In control. No panic. No nail-biting. That's your God, Christian! This is who you pray to! You serve a God who is in total control of everything...*even your last breath*. Think about that.

So right off the bat, Psalm 123 is letting God's character infect everything. It's like the psalmist wants this prayer to break out in "heavenly hives." He wants the God who is enthroned in the heavens to affect and permeate this entire prayer right from the get-go. And isn't this exactly what you and I need more than anything as we suffer and endure life in a sin-filled world? Don't we need our lives to break out with heavenly hives? Don't we need God to infect and permeate everything that we are going through? We need the character of God to infect our lives and to spread everywhere, more than we need the Coronavirus to stop spreading.

Let me say that again: *We need the character of God to infect our lives and to spread everywhere, more than we need the Coronavirus to stop spreading.*

What you and I need when we suffer is this: we need God rubbed into our pain, God rubbed into our troubles, God rubbed into our fears. We need who Jesus is and what He has done rubbed down into our pores. We need a vision of the Triune God, enthroned up above the heavens, rubbed deep down into our pain, troubles, and fear. We need the Holy Spirit to infect every area of our hearts. And that's what the psalmist does right out of the gate with his prayer.

And what happens when you get a glimpse of the Triune God enthroned above the heavens? What happens when you get a reminder that Jesus is all-powerful and in control of everything? It kinda has a way of humbling you, doesn't it? It kinda has a way of making your knees bend.

LOOK AT VERSE 2...

Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us.

You see, there's just something about seeing Jesus high and lifted up that takes your breath away. There's just something about seeing God sitting on His throne that knocks you down a size or two. There's just something about seeing Jesus that will knock your socks off, that will knock the swagger out of your step.

Catching a glimpse of the enthroned God kinda has a way of making your knees bend- that is, if you're willing to be humbled. That is, if you're willing to admit your weakness. But I suspect that you are like me and at times you are allergic to weakness. Why are we this way? Because we don't like to admit that we need help! The old Adam dies a long, slow painful death in our hearts.

We forget that helplessness is *how prayer works*. We forget that helplessness is how the Christian life works. We forget that to be a Christian, you have to be able to bend your knees.

And that's what we see in verse 2. Servants humble themselves. Maidservants bend at the knee. Servants and maidservants look to their masters for everything. They are dependent. The eye that looks to the master acknowledges weakness, acknowledges need. *A lifted eye implies a bent knee*. And the hand that acknowledges the lifted eye is the Master who is enthroned above who is willing to meet that need. And that's prayer! We look to God, we lift up our eyes, we acknowledge our need, we admit our helplessness, and Jesus extends His hand and meets our need. That's prayer! That's faith! That's what coming to Jesus is all about!

We look to Him because we know that-
JESUS LOVES DESPERATE PEOPLE.

And we know the people in Psalm 123 are desperate because they tell us what they are doing in verse 2: *...our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us.*

These guys are not gonna stop seeking God *until* He has mercy! That's what desperate people do. Desperate people don't quit seeking help, do they? Desperate people are desperate and therefore they have no quit in them. Desperate people have faith! Think about that! Desperate people keep seeking help and when they do, it's proof of their faith! Desperation doesn't mean that you don't have faith. Desperation is proof that you do have faith because you hightail it to Jesus!

So, this phrase here in verse 2- "*till he has mercy upon us*"- that's faith! Verse 2 is stuffed with faith. "*We are gonna keep looking to you, Jesus, until you have mercy upon us.*" That's faith. We will not stop until you have mercy on us. And that's exactly what they pray for next: mercy!

LOOK AT VERSE 3...

Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

They are praying for God's *mercy* or *grace*. The idea with this Hebrew word- *and it usually gets translated as either "mercy" or "grace"*- the idea with this word is "favor." It's the Hebrew word for *grace*. God's unmerited favor. It's the Gospel, really! They are asking for a heartfelt response from Yahweh to be gracious to them, to be merciful to them, to have compassion on them and to give them what they need, namely, relief from those who are scorning them.

So what the psalmist is really doing here is this: he is telling us what Jesus is like! He's telling us that Jesus is merciful, gracious. Notice that 3x he uses this Hebrew word (*hānan*) for *favor* or *grace*. This word *hānan* depicts a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to one who has a need. It's the heart of God moving out to desperate sinners in order to meet their needs.

So the psalmist piles these words up, 3x he uses this word *hānan* because he really believes that this is who Jesus is! It's all that God is for sinners like us. It's His mercy, grace, favor, compassion. It's Jesus, really!

So we look to Jesus knowing that this is what He is like. At His core. This is who He really is. In His essence. He really is kind. He really is good. We look to Him and, really, is there any other option? We look to the God who sits enthroned in the heavens and who just so happens to be the most kind, merciful Person that exists! That's what our hearts need to hear this morning! The most powerful Person in the universe, who is in control of everything- *even our last breath*- He is full of love and compassion for us! Amazing! Jesus really isn't like that bartender in Star Wars!

But notice too, the time element here. They look to the Lord, they wait on Him *until* He has mercy on them. This is another gentle reminder from the Holy Spirit that discipleship is learning over and over and over again that your life is one big experience of "*To you I lift up my eyes.*" That's discipleship. Discipleship is one life-long journey of repeating these words to Jesus: "*To you I lift up my eyes.*" It's praying often, "*Have mercy upon us, O LORD.*"

Discipleship is just being like Jan Brady, on *The Brady Bunch*. Remember that episode where she says, "*Marsha, Marsha, Marsha!*" That's a picture of discipleship. We just say, "*Mercy, mercy, mercy!*" We just say, "*Mercy, mercy, mercy!*" until Jesus intervenes.

And that means that we will have to 1) learn to wait and 2) be comfortable with the unknown.

"*Till he has mercy upon us*" implies what? "*Till he has mercy upon us*" implies *waiting*. And waiting and waiting. And we don't like waiting, do we? We hate delays, right? "Coronavirus *Costco*" lines? Ain't nobody got time for that! We hate waiting, don't we? We want Jesus to answer our prayers yesterday! We hate ambiguity, right? We want to be able to discern and know what God's up to. We hate waiting. Oh, how we hate waiting on God! And we hate silence- when it seems like God is quiet and not answering our prayers. But this is where we get to know Jesus more! In those times when it seems like God is not listening, not answering, not doing anything on our behalf, that's when we can grow in our relationship with Jesus! This is where we get to know Jesus more.

Listen, Grace. There's no way to change this reality. While we seek to follow God faithfully in this world, many times we find ourselves in desperate situations and unpredictable moments that we would not choose. And so God often leads us in this way, along paths that we would not choose for ourselves, and He leads us to these places because He has purposes for us that are far beyond us. Let me say that again: He has purposes for us far beyond what we can see! He's going to use everything happening in our world right to further His kingdom and bring good into our lives. You can count on that!

So, what many times appear as *misfortunes* in our lives actually later end up being God's *mercies* to us. It's just hard to see in the moment because trusting Jesus is hard, right? God is good at turning misfortunes into mercies. We just have to wait. And while we wait, what are we called to do? Trust. Rest. Believe.

Listen, Jesus knows what is best for us. He knows what is best for you...you don't. He knows what is best. And you can trust Him, no matter what you're going through right now.

So we have to learn to wait with *expectation*. We don't wait biting our nails, hoping He comes through. We don't wait pacing the floor. We wait in faith because we know what kind of God He is. He sits enthroned in the heavens! We know that about Him. He's faithful. Listen, God is not toying with us right now. He's not playing games. He's not getting some weird kick out of watching us squirm as we wait. That's not who He is.

Waiting until He has mercy upon us is faith doing what faith does- which is waiting! Faith waits until the promise is fulfilled. And faith is not fazed. Not because our faith is so special. Faith is not fazed because

faith knows who God is. Faith knows that God sits enthroned in the heavens. And knowing who God is enables faith to be patient as it waits.

But the words in verse 2- "*till he has mercy upon us*"- those words also imply that we are going to have to get used to the unknown, while we wait. Listen, if the unknown bothers you, you'll be a frustrated Christian. You have to deal with a lot of unknown when you become a Christian. But it's what you do know, that gets you through the unknown. It's what you know about Jesus that gets you through all of the unknown that you have to go through.

And part of what the people here in Psalm 123 are going through is dealing with unbelievers who are ridiculing them. They are weary of being ridiculed and laughed at because of their faith in Yahweh. So they speak in verses 3-4 of "being full" and "having more than enough" of all this ridicule and scorn. Their souls are "stuffed" with all of this ridicule. The Hebrew word here has the idea of being filled to the brim, of being stuffed with food. They are "stuffed" on all of this scorn and contempt and they can't take any more. So they are asking Yahweh to stoop down and be gracious to them and to stop the scorn and contempt that they have had enough of. They want Yahweh to extend grace to them. They want and need grace.

And what we actually see here is that Psalm 123 is a gift of God's grace to us. Psalm 123 is God extending His grace to us because what Psalm 123 reminds us of is that life is not easy. Psalm 123 reminds us that we will suffer and we will have to endure hostility. God, in His grace, shows us the reality of serving Him in this world. He tells us right here in this psalm that life is hard.

Why? Why do we have psalms like Psalm 123? Derek Kidner says "*...it is a function of the Psalms to touch the nerve of this problem and keep its pain alive, against the comfort of our familiarity...with a corrupt world.*" (Psalms 1-72, p.71) God gives us psalms like Psalm 123 to touch the nerve of this problem so that we won't get comfortable in this world.

There is a lot of ink spilled in the psalms about our enemies and our troubles, precisely to touch the nerve so that we will be reminded that life is hard. When the nerves of our souls get touched by problems, we can't get comfortable with this world, can we? This psalm leaves you feeling uncomfortable because there is no resolution after verse 4. There's no verse 5. You want a verse 5. You want it to end and read that the prayer was answered. You want a verse 5. But we don't get that. Why? Because this is where life takes us sometimes. We pray and we pray and we pray and sometimes we don't see the answer- at least not the way we want it.

Of course, God always answers our prayers, just not in the way we want sometimes. Or, we don't see Him answer it but He does, in His time, and in His ways. And that's an uncomfortable place to be, huh? Sometimes we are left hanging just like at the end of Psalm 123. Sometimes you pray and you pour your heart out to God and then you have to wait. And wait. And wait. And wait.

And that's the point that this psalm is trying to make. Sure, we'd love to have the resolution to this psalm. We'd love to see it end with something like, "*Yahweh answered our prayers. Yahweh heard our cries and saved us from our scoffers. Let Israel worship the name of the LORD.*"

But it doesn't end that way, does it? There's no resolution. But, it really doesn't matter if there's resolution or not, because those things are not what's most important. The psalmist has intentionally left it out. But, he has included what is most important.

And what is most important is what he told you back in verse 1: *O you who are enthroned in the heavens!* What the psalmist wants you to walk away with is not having your curiosity satisfied. He wants you to walk away from Psalm 123 remembering that Yahweh sits enthroned above the heavens! And you can call on Him just like these people did in Psalm 123. You pray to the same God- the same God who hears your cries for mercy. The One who just so happens to be enthroned above the heavens. And that ought to be just enough truth to get you through all that's going on in our world today.

What you need right now as you go through whatever trial Jesus has you going through right now is this: *information about God*. That's what you need. More info about Jesus. More Gospel. More reminders about Jesus. You don't need answers. Oh, you'd like answers, but you don't need answers. What you need is God. Answers won't necessarily bring you the peace that you so desperately want. But Jesus will. As David Powlison says-

"Your relationship with God is what brings peace, not having every question answered."

The God who lives in verse 1 is the One who brings you peace. The God who dispenses mercy and grace to struggling sinners is the One who brings peace. And acknowledging your helplessness actually brings

you this peace! Admitting that you can do nothing and that you know nothing will bring you the peace you need! Admitting that you are a complete idiot will bring you the peace that you desperately crave!

So, our weakness is the channel that allows us access to God's grace and peace. The Gospel uses your weakness as the door to God's grace. That's Psalm 123. That's how grace works. Bending your knee makes grace flow downhill. Helplessness is the door to God's grace, not comfort. We think comfort and security brings God's grace. No. Helplessness and weakness usher in grace, not comfort. And that means then that comfortable people have no need of Jesus...but desperate people do! And the good news of the Gospel is that-

JESUS LOVES DESPERATE PEOPLE.

And the proof of that is that Jesus died for us when we were sinners. He died for desperate people who could never be good enough to earn God's love, never be good enough to earn God's favor. That's why God came down- because we could never earn our way. So Jesus comes and offers unmerited favor. Jesus comes and empties out the heart of God for people like us- for people who hoard groceries, for people who blame others, for people who have yelled at their kids because they have been cooped up with them all week. Jesus comes to people like that and He pours out God's love and grace.

So, there's never been a better time to be a sinner! There's never been a better time to be a desperate sinner! Why? Because of the cross. The cross is where we see the favor of God, the *hānan* of God. At the cross we see the heartfelt response of God giving to desperate sinners who have needs. The cross is the heart of God moving out to desperate sinners in order to meet their needs.

As Octavius Winslow (1808-1878) said-

"The cross of Jesus displays the most awful exhibition of God's hatred of sin and at the same time the most august manifestation of his readiness to pardon it. Pardon, full and free, is written out in every drop of blood that is seen, is proclaimed in every groan that is heard, and shines in the very prodigy of mercy that closes the solemn scene upon the cross. O blessed door of return, open and never shut, to the wanderer from God! How glorious, how free, how accessible! Here the sinful, the vile, the guilty, the unworthy, the poor, the penniless, may come. Here too the weary spirit may bring its burden, the broken spirit its sorrow, the guilty spirit its sin, the backsliding spirit its wandering. All are welcome here. The death of Jesus was the opening and the emptying of the full heart of God; it was the outgushing of that ocean of infinite mercy that heaved and panted and longed for an outlet; it was God showing how he could love a poor, guilty sinner." (Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul, p.183-184)

The door to the heart of God is open for you. You access it by going through the cross. By admitting your sin and turning away from you and then, by faith, with the empty hands of faith, taking Jesus up on His offer. It's glorious! It's free! So, come! What are you waiting for? Come on home to Jesus. Unload your burden. Bring your sorrow, bring your broken heart. Come reeking of your sin! All are welcome here.

Really? Anyone can come? Yes. Why? Because Jesus is not like that rude bartender in Star Wars. *"Hey! We don't serve their kind here!...Your droids. They'll have to wait outside. We don't want them here."* Some people think Jesus is like that. Like you show up and He says, *"I don't want your kind here."* But that's not Jesus at all. He's not like that at all. Jesus says, *"We serve your kind here! All are welcome!"*

God loves desperate sinners. His heart has opened up and emptied itself out. There's infinite mercy gushing out for you. Pardon and forgiveness- full and free. Receive it. Have you been wandering from God? The door is open and never shut. Come on home. All are welcome here.

Let's pray...

"Jesus Is Not Like That Rude Bartender In Star Wars"

Psalm 123:1-4

Sermon Study Questions

1. Discuss how *desperation* can be proof of *faith*, not the absence of it.
2. Discuss what Derek Kidner said about the reality of the Psalms about suffering in this life:

"...it is a function of the Psalms to touch the nerve of this problem and keep its pain alive, against the comfort of our familiarity...with a corrupt world."

3. How does the psalmist begin his prayer? Where is his focus?

4. How does this psalm end? Why is there no resolution? How might you encourage someone who feels that God is not answering their prayers? What would you say to them? What Scriptures might you use to encourage them?

5. Discuss these thoughts from the sermon:

David Powlison

"Your relationship with God is what brings peace, not having every question answered."

Octavius Winslow

"The cross of Jesus displays the most awful exhibition of God's hatred of sin and at the same time the most august manifestation of his readiness to pardon it. Pardon, full and free, is written out in every drop of blood that is seen, is proclaimed in every groan that is heard, and shines in the very prodigy of mercy that closes the solemn scene upon the cross. O blessed door of return, open and never shut, to the wanderer from God! How glorious, how free, how accessible! Here the sinful, the vile, the guilty, the unworthy, the poor, the penniless, may come. Here too the weary spirit may bring its burden, the broken spirit its sorrow, the guilty spirit its sin, the backsliding spirit its wandering. All are welcome here. The death of Jesus was the opening and the emptying of the full heart of God; it was the outgushing of that ocean of infinite mercy that heaved and panted and longed for an outlet; it was God showing how he could love a poor, guilty sinner."