

Looking To God As We Are Despised

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[0:00] How many of you have been watching the Olympics? Ah, fair number, good. Isn't it exciting to see your country's athletes striving and struggling and running and swimming! with all their might in order to win.

Something very beautiful about the whole thing. And the spirit of the Olympics is something that's so positive. No one gets booed.

Even the person coming in last has someone somewhere cheering for them and thinking what a great thing it is that they made it there.

The Christian life is also called a race. Not more than once, or more than once in the Bible. And it's not like an Olympic race, though.

Because the Christian race, in the Christian race, we aren't running just against ourselves and against the time. We are running against the hatred of the watching world.

[1:14] The Olympians have the whole world's love and cheers. And no one boos at the Olympics, but you hear a lot of boos when it comes to racing the Christian race.

It's more like visiting. It's more like being the visiting team as you're going into your arch rivals stadium or field.

One time, this is so, it's impressed upon my memory. It was so striking. I went to a minor league hockey game in the rough part of Cleveland.

And Cleveland's a blue collar, kind of nitty gritty city. I don't know if you've been there. And the arena was like downtown with all these factories.

And it was something. And the visiting team, this minor league hockey team from Buffalo, I think, came. And they got booed so bad.

[2:08] It was incredible. I've never seen anything like it. During the announce, you know, they're announcing the players. The stadium is just booing the other team.

The people booed during the Canadian National Anthem. By the third period, people were drunk and they're screaming. And, you know, it was just terrible.

And it was just because they were on the other team. They were hated just because. That's kind of what it's like running the Christian race.

It's not the Olympics full of talking about brotherhood and love and camaraderie and coming together. It's done in this cold, dark arena and enemy territory with the enemy surrounding you. And the question is, how do you keep running? How do you keep going on when that's the situation and when those are the circumstances? Psalm 123 tells us.

[3:13] And that's where we're going to be, what we're going to be looking at today. So I'd invite you to turn to Psalm 123. Remember, we're going through these songs of ascent in this afternoon time together.

And the songs of ascent are sort of a hitchhiker's guide to the Christian life. It's a travel book. You can think of it as something that you can see what you're going to be facing.

See the good things and the bad things, the hard things, the hills of difficulty that you're going to have to trudge up. And Psalm 123 is about running against a hostile crowd.

So let's read it together. Psalm 123. I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven, as the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress.

So our eyes look to the Lord, our God, till he shows us his mercy. Have mercy on us, O Lord. Have mercy on us. For we have endured much contempt.

[4:30] We have endured much ridicule from the proud, much contempt from the arrogant. Psalm 123 is one of those psalms that begins at the end and ends at the beginning.

You have the problem in the verses 3 and 4, and you have the solution in verses 1 and 2. And so we're going to look at the problem first, and that's 3 and 4.

Three times you see it. Contempt. Ridicule. And then contempt again. And there are very few things that are more difficult to bear with than contempt.

When someone holds you up in contempt, they pick you up. They examine you. They evaluate you. They measure you.

And then they despise you. And it's one of disgust. And hatred. And you're nothing but something like a spider that you want to squash.

[5:38] Have you ever seen one of those where it comes every now and then out in my study, a spider comes down from the ceiling and walks around my desk. And it gives me the heebie-jeebies, and I just want to squash it.

And I do. And I wonder about how spiritual I am and all that sort of thing. But it's to be despised. To be held in contempt.

I had a job evaluation one time at an old job. And for lots of reasons, nothing to do with my character or my work ethic, I was not someone that the company really valued.

They wanted people who would sell their soul to the company and move on the drop of a hat and just do whatever it took to keep getting promoted and to keep bringing business.

And that wasn't something that I was after. And I remember having this interview and this evaluation with these people. And as they're talking to me, one of them looked over at his comrade and he said, Do you see what's going on here?

[6:43] And they turned and looked back at me, and I could read the ridicule and the contempt on their faces. It was just a problem to take care of, a bug to be squashed at the right time.

Do you know how that feels? It's hard. It's hard to endure. We all like to be liked. We like to be valued and understood. We like to be appreciated.

We don't want people looking at us with disgust and with dislike. But if you are living the Christian life, if you're going to live a Christian life, then that is going to happen.

It's going to happen to you. Remember, Paul wrote to Timothy. You'll remember this verse. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be, what is it?

Persecuted. You're going to be persecuted. It's not a possibility. It's an inevitability. And so I have to ask you, is that something that you face?

[7:49] Does Psalm 123 ring true? Does it connect with something in your life? Do you struggle with this harsh reality of enduring, having to endure the contempt of the proud?

And do you need the mercy of God that we read about in verses 1 and 2? Or is your Christian life more or less a secret life that you just keep within the walls of your home?

Or you keep within the walls of this building? Right here, right now, you're a Christian. You'll stand up for Christ when everyone else is standing up. Are you like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who, because of the Jewish leaders, were only Jesus' disciple in secret?

In secret. Psalm 123 only greets us, only meets us, and it only comes to us as we're standing in the position of being held in contempt.

If we're in secret, not standing up, then Psalm 123 has very little to say to us. Winston Churchill was a great man in a lot of ways.

[9:03] He said a lot of pithy, powerful things, very keenly put. He was a very witty man. He had this ongoing verbal duel with this lady, Astor, and one time she said to him, if I were married to you, I'd make you drink poison.

And he said, if I were married to you, I would drink the poison. Then, sharp mind. You remember what he said to the British people when, at the low point of World War II, he said, you ask, what is our policy?

And I say, it's to wage war in the land. By sea, land, and air, with all of our might, with all the strength that God can give us, that's our policy. Very courageous man. Very charismatic man. But he said something else that I want you to think about. And he said this, you have enemies.

Good. That means you stood up for something sometime in your life.

You have enemies. Good. That means that you've stood up for something sometime in your life.

And Psalm 123 begs us to ask ourselves, have we stood up for God?

[10:18] Have we drawn a line in the sand and said to the watching world, this is where I stand with Martin Luther. You may ridicule me. You may condemn me. You may persecute me. You may

hold me in contempt.

But here I stand. I can do no other. Has it come to that for you? Where you said, I'm not going to be a Christian just in the four walls of this building or just the four walls of my house.

But I'm going to stand up for Jesus wherever and whenever. So we go into a crowded room in a Roman palace.

And we see Jesus standing up for you. And you can smell the sweat. You can see the grime on the floor.

And you can hear the loud laughter. And Jesus is dressed in a purple robe. And the soldiers are hitting him and pulling out his beard. And they say to him, prophesy, who hit you?

[11:20] And Luke says, and they said many other insulting things to him. And on the cross, people hurled their insults at him. Luke says the rulers even sneered at him.

They said he saved others. Let him save himself. So brother and sister. Jesus stood up for you. He loved you and he faced contempt and shame for your sake.

And he even went further than that. Those things were hard, I'm sure. But Jesus stood up for you and he identified with you when God was judging your sin.

When God came in his wrath, Jesus identified with you when it meant nothing but shame. There was nothing but pain. There was nothing but God's holy indignation.

And Jesus said, this one is with me. This one is mine. And he stood up for you. And so have you stood up for him?

[12:31] He was the stone the builders rejected. He was a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, like one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised.

And we esteemed him not. That was part of Jesus' identity as one that received contempt. And to some extent, all of Jesus' disciples will follow in his footsteps.

And it's going to be that way. If we are going to live a godly life in a sinful world, it's like playing that hockey game in the enemy's territory. We are going to be persecuted.

And I think it's going to be harder and harder. We've been very blessed in this country to have peace, to have a bit of prosperity.

And we're able to enjoy freedoms. But things are changing. And we cannot fool ourselves. And we can't put on rose-colored glasses and whistle in the dark and pretend like it's always going to be this way.

[13:39] Unless something amazing happens, there is darkness coming. And the question is, are you ready for it? If you stumble in the days of ease, how will you stand in the days of hardship?

If a small breeze blows you over, how will you stand when the hurricane comes? And so maybe those days are here for you already.

At work or at home. Maybe you have counted the cost. And you have received the contempt and the ridicule of men. And you've been blasted for it.

And you're left burned. And you're left withered. You've experienced the hurricane. And your leaves have been stripped from you. And you're feeling that agony of rejection. If that's you, what should you do?

Well, Psalm 23 helps us with the first two verses. Two and a half verses. Look at verses 1 and 2. I lift my eyes to you.

[14:45] To you whose throne is in heaven. Doesn't that sound familiar? Psalm 121 began that way. I lift my eyes up to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

We must have a hard time looking in the right place. When the psalmist has to keep on telling us, look up. Look up.

It's something that we need to be reminded of. Because where do we look so often when those bad things, whatever shape they take, where do we have the tendency to look when we receive the ridicule and the scorn of men?

Well, we look at them. We look at them. We focus on them. What are they saying about us? I can't believe they said that about me. Can't they understand me? Why don't they listen to me?

Why do they have to be this way? And we look at them. And our focus is upon them. And we're focused on what they're saying about us. And the psalmist says, don't look at them.

[15:48] There's no help there. There's no solving the problem there. Or we look at ourselves. We say, I can't handle this. This is too much for me.

I can't put up with much more of this. This hurts too much. I don't have what it takes. I don't know what to do. I, I, I, I. And then we dive deep into ourselves.

And we look at all of our inadequacies. And we look at our weakness. And we focus on those things. And we try to find strength to keep going. Going over it all again and again in our heads.

And we look to ourselves. But the psalmist says, don't look at yourselves. There's no help up there or in there. We're so good at looking at the wrong, in the wrong places.

The psalmist says, not out there, not in here, but up. Not out there, not in here, but up. Where's the first place you should look when you run into any kind of problem?

[16:54] Not out, not in, but up. So tomorrow, whenever, whatever bad thing happens. Whenever, whatever trial hits you. Whether it's the scorn of men.

Or whether it's disease or sickness. Or issues with money. Whatever the problem is. Don't look out. And don't look in. The psalmist says, and he keeps saying, look up.

Look up. And what do we see when we look up? You. To you whose throne is in heaven. When the ridicule of man hits you.

And then you look up to heaven. And that inadequacy hits you. And you look up to heaven. What do you see? You see God reigning.

God reigning. And his throne is in heaven. His throne is in heaven. That means it's not on earth. It's not subject to the comings and goings of earthly kingdoms.

[17:52] He rules over all. He rules forever. He rules perfectly. And so when the waves crash in on you. Look at the throne that's above the waves.

Be still and know that I am God. Doesn't that make you happy? It's meant to make you happy. The very thought that God is reigning.

Before his throne. The sea is like a glass. Revelation 4 talks about. It's calm. And bright.

There's none of the hurryings. There's none of the fear. Nothing disturbs his plans. Psalm 2. The nations rage.

And the Lord laughs. And so all men are like the grass of the field. The grass withers. Flowers fall. Because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

[18:54] So what is all this men huffing and puffing. And heaving their ridicule on God's people. God blows upon them. And they wither and die. With a mere rebuke.

He dries up the sea. With a mere rebuke. So when was the last time that you filled your bathtub full of water. And said get back.

And the water just went right down the drain. And disappeared. I don't know what happened to it. With a mere rebuke. He dries up the sea. Remember the storm on the sea in the gospels. And Jesus is asleep.

And it's storming. And it's raining. The waves are crashing. And the disciples come. And Jesus rebukes. The wind and the waves. And they hear his voice. And instantly everything is calm.

And so the psalmist is saying. Look up. Your eyes are too full of this. And you're not seeing the big picture of God.

[19:52] Sitting above the circle of the earth. And so when you look up. You don't only see God who rules. But he goes on. And you see this God who's full of mercy.

Full of mercy. As the eyes of the slaves. Look to the hand of their master. As the eyes of a maid. Looks to the hand of her mistress. So our eyes look to the Lord our God.

Till he shows us his mercy. Have mercy on us oh Lord. Have mercy on us. God is full of mercy for you.

Amen. And so when we take the place of the servant. The slave. The maid. And what that means is. We don't say. I don't own anything. We say. I have no rights. I have no power. Lord. I need.

[20:49] And we look to him. And the Lord is full of mercy. For us. We look expectantly. We should look expectantly. Because God is full of mercy.

And if he's full of it. Things that are full tend to spill out. Don't they? You fill a glass of water. And it's completely full. If you just jostle it a little bit. The water comes out. God is full of mercy.

And when our weaknesses. And our needs hit him. Mercy comes out upon us. And so we should look expectantly. And that's what's going on in this picture.

The slave is looking at the hand of his master. So. There's some kids in here. Kids. Do you ever feed your cat or your dog treats?

Our cat, Lancelot. Normally gets a treat every morning. And it comes in this little cardboard box. And when he hears the treat. Right? The treat's shaking around in the box.

[21 : 48] Whatever he's doing. Wherever he's out. He comes running. And then what you can do. Is you can take the box. And you can lift it up. And he'll lift his head up. And you can take it down. And he'll follow. And left and right. That's the kind of games we play on our cat. And. So. But why does he do that? Because he's expecting something.

He's expecting something. He knows a treat is coming. And that's the way you should be with your God. Your eyes upon him. He's given you mercy in the past.

Every morning mercy is new. Fall is fresh. Morning dew. He gives mercy to the oppressed. He gives mercy to the weak. Those who seek. Find. Those who knock.

The door is answered. And so he's not only this great king. That rules above it all. He's this generous master. A merciful Lord.

[22 : 45] And so keep looking. Brothers and sisters. I don't know. What you're facing. What stubborn issue. You're running into.

But keep looking. Mercy will come. Mercy will come. He who did not spare his own son. But gave him up for us all. How will he not with him.

Give us all things. If you give the greatest thing. That you own. To someone. To bless them. What is. So many other lesser things. God's mercy.

Doesn't always come quickly. By our standards. But brothers and sisters. It's coming. As sure as Jesus died. And rose again. Mercy is coming.

And he'll give that mercy. To endure. These times of scorn. And contempt. And ridicule. But soon. He'll give more. Than mercy. To endure. That mercy. Will overwhelm us.

[23 : 43] And there'll be no more need. To endure. He'll take away. The proud. God opposes. The proud. And at the right time. He will take care of them.

And you'll look. And there'll be no more. There's the English proverb. That says all good things. Must come to an end. And that is almost completely wrong. Because all bad things. Must come to an end. Because the Lord is on high. And he is good. So Jesus who died. Will be satisfied. And heaven. And earth.

Will be one. So keep looking then. Keep trusting them. And as the world rages. And there's problems. Keep looking up. God rules.

And he has mercy in his hands. He has mercy in his hands for you. Well God is good. And we're going to be singing. The mercies of the Lord forever. And so let's begin. By singing that song from the overhead.

[24 : 41] Let's stand and sing. Our heavenly father. We thank you for your great mercies. To us. We have only begun. To drink.

Of all that. You have planned for us. And. But what we have. Experienced so far. Has been so good. And so we thank you for it. We thank you. For our Lord Jesus.

Our savior. Our friend. The one who stood by us. And I pray that. As we. Think about his love for us. That our love. Would be. Would be. Fanned into.

A greater flame. And that we would burn. Brighter and hotter. For him. That we would not be afraid of men. But our love would overcome. Our love for you. Would overcome.

Every fear. And that we would stand with him. Who stood with us. Father we thank you. That your mercy. Will endure.

[25 : 38] That you will overcome. All of our enemies. You will put. All of. Jesus enemies. Under him. And because we are.

Reigning with him. You will put all of. Our enemies. Under our feet. And we long. Father. For that coming day. When heaven and earth. Will be one.

And then. We will see you. We will. Know you. Even as we are known. Lord I pray. That you would grow us. In our faith this week. Keep us.

Looking up. Not living. For what other people. Say about us. And think about us. Not. Dwelling on our own. Weaknesses. And our own problems. And our own inadequacies.

But seeing in Jesus Christ. Everything that we need. For life. And godliness. From this day. And forevermore.

[26 : 30] I pray. I pray. Lord. For your glory. Pray. That you would. Work in sinners lives. To call them to yourself. That. That you would show them your goodness. And that your goodness.

Would lead them to repentance. Pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.