This psalm is another in the series of psalms sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem at feast time – sung as they prepare themselves to meet with God and His people.

**PRAY** – as we prepare to approach God, both today and in our preparation for our eternal future.

Martin Luther said of this psalm, it is ’but short and therefore a very fit example to show the force of prayer not to consist in many words, but in fervency of spirit. For great and weighty matters may be comprised in a few words, if they proceed from the spirit and the unspeakable groanings of the heart…’

**v1 - Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.**

**Unto You I lift up my eyes**: The psalmist immediately declares what we should all be declaring each and every day of our lives – that our focus is on God and that we lift up our eyes to Him.

By adjusting our focus to God, we actually take the focus off ourselves – our own circumstances – we look to the One who is, or should be, the most important and immovable feature of our lives.

Remember in Psalm 121, the writer said, ‘**I lift up my eyes to the hills.**’

Here the writer is looking beyond the hills, but to as high as he is able, to the heavens and God.

He acknowledges that God, his ultimate sovereign, is the One who **dwell**s **in the heavens**. As the writer would have gained confidence knowing where God is – and there is no one higher – we can also have that same confidence, to put our trust in Him.

The first four psalms of ascent can be seen as a progression:

* 120 is a lament concerning the writer’s surroundings.
* 121 sees the writer lift his eyes to the hills of Zion.
* 122 the pilgrims look forward to and praise in the house of the LORD.
* 123 the pilgrim looks beyond Jerusalem towards the LORD in heaven.

There is a similarity to last week’s message in that we should be looking beyond our earthly problems and circumstances, to lay sight upon the Heavenly kingdom that is promised to us.

In this case, the pilgrim’s goal is not Jerusalem or the temple within, the goal is God, whose true throne is only in heaven.

**v2 - Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until He has mercy on us.**

The psalmist has his eyes on the master, awaiting his instructions. The modern-day example would be a butler standing behind his master seated at dinner – looking for merest sign that action was required.

It is the same servant/master relationship that we see throughout the Bible in those men and women who truly want to serve the Lord.

It is a relationship that has three parts:

* **Dependence** - The servant depends on the master to provide all his needs.
* **Submission** - The servant allows the master to direct his work.
* **Discipline** - The master will guide and correct the servant as required.

We should all be looking to have that same relationship guidance. It matters not whether you end up as one of the Christian greats or not, the important thing is that you have submitted to the Lord, put your dependence in Him and allow yourself to be disciplined and moulded by Him.

As if there is any doubt as to whom our attention should be focussed, the psalmist makes it clear in the latter part of **v2** - **our eyes look to the LORD our God…**

Who or what do you fix your eyes on? Honesty test.

‘Do we look to God like that – reverently, obediently, attentively, continuously, expectantly, singly, submissively, imploringly? Probably not, but we should.’

If you don’t know how to do that, Spurgeon told us to look around. He said that. ‘…creation (everything that is around us), providence (our situation) and grace (God’s provision and kindness), are the work of God’s hand - and from each of them it is our duty to learn about God; therefore should we carefully study them, to discover His divine will.’

**v3 - Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud.**

That we request God should **have mercy on us**, should go without saying, as we are dependent on His loving grace for our salvation. How often do we actually go before Him and ask Him to be merciful?

This mercy is something we should not just sit back and wait for – it is something that needs to be actively sought. The writer here is actually begging God for mercy, he was not prepared to sit back and wait for it.

Nor is waiting on the LORD a passive thing – in a way we should all be waiting on the Lord, even if we know we are currently in His Will and doing His work.

We should be looking to Him to constantly check the direction in which we are going.

If you are not sure you are where He wants you to be, then equally, you should be seeking His Will – it is not good to be outside His Will and perfect protection.

The **contempt** the writer is speaking about here, is from others.

The Hebrew word translated her as **exceedingly filled** means ‘to be saturated’, as in completely filled by something.

The idea is, that as much contempt had been thrown upon them as could be; they could experience no more.

Has anyone ever shown you contempt for any reason, or specifically because of your faith?

Contempt from others can be callous. It has been described as having the potential to go deeper into the spirit than any other form of rejection.

In some circumstances it can be easy to deal with, as easily as letting a drop of water drip off a coat. But at other times it may not be that easy – and it begins to affect us – filling us until we are **exceedingly filled**.

It is at these times that we should especially come before God for His mercy – only He has the answer and can save us.

Scorn or contempt may not be easy to deal with, but it can be made worse when it comes from those who the writer describes as being **at ease** – probably meaning those who seem to have few problems or difficulties in life.

This is a comment upon humanity – those who seemingly have it all are often those who are missing the most important thing of all – trust in God.

In the psalmist’s time, that faith was focussed towards whom we would acknowledge as God the Father – they were awaiting the promised Messiah.

Today, the focus of our faith can be on Jesus for our salvation.

A Christian commentator stated, ‘the reason people ridicule what they oppose, aside from it being so easy, is that it is demoralising and frequently effective. It is effective because it strikes at the hidden insecurities or weaknesses that almost everybody has.’

It is generally those who are insecure deep down in their own lives that are the greatest in being contemptuous of others. As Jesus prayed for those were in effect His enemies, we should be praying for those who shown us contempt – they need salvation too.

You may not be able to witness directly in words, but through your prayers and continuing Godly actions, they may yet see they also have a need for Jesus as a Saviour.

In a way, the battle is not yours – it belongs to the Lord – and we should wait, along with the psalmist, for God’s mercy.

We can be assured and have total confidence that God’s mercy will triumph over the contempt of the proud, along with every other injustice, crime or Godless act that people aim at you.

If you want encouragement, take a look at the events that preceded **Acts 5:41 …they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name.**

This is Peter and the apostles living out their faith to spread the word of God that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They treated it as an honour to suffer for God’s glory.

That confidence is what the next Psalm 124 expresses.

Here we have David expressing His thanks to God for His continued presence and help in all situations.

### He says, ‘**If it had not been the LORD who was on our side… when men rose up against us,’**

David calls on His people – believers in Jesus are an extension to that group as we are within God’s covenant – to acknowledge that the only real help we have in life’s events is from God.

We should recognise and then praise God that He isn’t just present in your life, but also actively working on behalf of His people. The words used by David can be translated as Immanuel – ‘God is with us’.

David says that his enemies **rose up against us** – we see that as a recurring theme during his reign, but God always stepped in, often in ways that are miraculous.

Have you ever felt as David clearly di, enabling him to write: **v3-5** - **‘Then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul.’**

You are in a desperate situation of you think your problems will swallow you alive. But David is encouraging his readers and giving praise to the Lord, that there is actually one solution – God wasn’t to be treated as one of the many possible solutions to your problems; He and He alone is your saviour and the answer to all your needs.

Who are you putting your trust in? On which side are you placing your resources – your gifts, abilities, time, money and energy?

If it isn’t in God and His Son Jesus, you are wasting the time you have been given on this earth by your Creator.

We can’t expect a life without problems, or some degree of persecution (however small), from those who don’t like the faith you have placed in God.

Remember the problems and resistance that Jesus faced in His earthly life. We can expect some of the same – the devil doesn’t want you to follow Jesus and the best was of dissuading you is to make life difficult because of your faith.

If you feel like life’s burdens have become as David described them – overwhelming – you are in good company with many other people.

The difference that you have, is the knowledge of a Saviour who wants to unburden you:

* to enable you to live life to the full (to enjoy yourself) and in that life to praise God.
* to live with a teaching that doesn’t burden you – knowing that God is in control of both your life and all the events in this world should be a great comfort and blessing to us all.

David is describing the destructive force of the waters following the torrential rains that are common in Israel – he is not describing a river, or even a rising flood, he is talking about a torrent that sweeps everything away.

If that is your situation, you can join David in getting reassurance from the Lord’s actions and then by giving Him praise.

**v6-7** - **Blessed be the LORD, Who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we have escaped.**

David’s action is to thank and praise God – to announce Him as blessed.

Having God central in your life, as David acknowledged, is to know that whatever is thrown at you in life, you will not be crushed nor trapped.

God’s people, when they walk in His ways, are safe from an eternal destruction.

David speaks in terms of people being caught in a snare in the same way that a bird does. Spurgeon talked about the ways that people get caught - ‘…fowlers have many methods of taking small birds and Satan has many methods of entrapping souls. Some are decoyed by evil companions, others are enticed by the love of dainties; hunger drives many into the trap and fright impels numbers to fly into the net.’ (Spurgeon)

‘As the bird could not get out of the snare, so the soul cannot escape from temptation; but God can bring it out, and he works the rescue. Hear this… whatever the sin that has [trapped] you, that gracious hand which once was nailed to the cross can set you free.’ (Spurgeon)

Both Spurgeon and the writer of this psalm are urging you to have confidence that God will continue to help and protect you.

**v8** - **Our help *is* in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.**

Along with David, we can be defiant when troubles come our way. We have the ability to call on the Name of the Lord - **Our help is in the name of the LORD**.

Whilst everyone else my rush around seeking solace or comfort in hoarding food, or seeking security in their finances, or whatever else we want to put our trust in, God’s people can confidently find their help in God’s Name.

The Lord has many names – a great study in itself – but one is our Creator.

He **made heaven and earth** – so putting your trust in Him is not a vain hope, with your fingers crossed for good measure. The God who created everything, merely, be speaking, is more powerful and more aware of your problems than you are.

He wants to help – He wants His people to worship Him and when we do worship Him, we will find our trust growing daily.

Your God both created all that you see and will preserve you from the evils which you cannot see.

**WHERE IS JESUS IN THESE PSALMS?**

Whilst the incarnate Messiah, Jesus, was several centuries away at the time these two psalms were written, He is clearly in the message.

Both writers are looking towards their salvation through God’s grace, which we know is through Jesus alone.

We know from the Bible that Jesus is eternal in the same way the God the Father is, so when the psalmists cry out to God, or call on His Name, they are calling upon Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ.

**CONCLUSION**

These two psalms are asking you to consider where you as an individual want to place your trust.

On this matter, there cannot be any degree of uncertainty in your life – there should be no uncertainty whether the Lord will be on your side or not.

Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, through His earthly life, death and resurrection has taken His place beside us forevermore. He is always on our side, so long as we keep His paths and walk in His ways.

For everything that we need delivering from in this life – both minor details and the power of death itself – we should approach and accept the salvation of God given to us through His Son Jesus.

**PRAYER / OFFER**

**READING**

### **Psalm 123**

#### **A song of ascents.**

**1 Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.**

**2 Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters,**

 **as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes**

**look to the LORD our God, until He has mercy on us.**

**3 Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are**

**exceedingly filled with contempt.**

**4 Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at**

**ease, with the contempt of the proud.**

### **Psalm 124**

#### **A song of ascents. Of David.**

**1If the Lord had not been on our side—
    let Israel say—
2if the Lord had not been on our side
    when people attacked us,
3they would have swallowed us alive
    when their anger flared against us;
4the flood would have engulfed us,
    the torrent would have swept over us,
5the raging waters
    would have swept us away.**

**6Praise be to the Lord,
    who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
7We have escaped like a bird
    from the fowler’s snare;
the snare has been broken,
    and we have escaped.
8Our help is in the name of the Lord,
    the Maker of heaven and earth.**