

Lifting Up Your Eyes

Psalm 123

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**The eye:** I was visiting my brother a couple of weeks ago. He offered to take me out for breakfast to his favourite breakfast spot. The restaurant had a sign on the door for a breakfast special. We walked and were greeted immediately and led to a table. We hardly sat down and our server asked us if we wanted coffee, which she poured almost immediately. I had taken just a couple of sips and she was back to fill it up. She was so attentive, that after every two sips, she would fill my cup to the brim. By the end of the breakfast, I probably had at least 4 cups of coffee (if you total the amount of all the refills). She would not let my coffee go cold or have it emptied more than an inch from the top. She had her eye on my movements and was extremely attentive to my brother and I so that the coffee was always at its best. I truly felt like a king.

***“To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens (Psalm 123: 1)!”*** The Psalm begins with the Psalmist’s priority in life. That is to look to the heavens, to the King of the universe who is master of his or her life. The next verse explains in a more ‘down to earth’ context of how that plays out: ***“As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, 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 upon us (Verse 2).”*** In other words, we are to serve our Master (God) and follow God’s instruction for our lives. When we are in step with our Lord, we will see God’s mercy on us. The example of the server at our breakfast table shows her attentiveness, so it is with the Master of our lives – Jesus our Lord! We are to show attentiveness to God and serve him. For example, as people made in the image of God, we are to love and help others who are also made in God’s image (as loved children of God). We are to help our brothers and sisters. In Matthew 25, God the Son (Jesus Christ our Lord) commends those who offered food to those who were hungry; water to those who were thirsty; hospitality to those who were strangers; clothes to those who were naked; care for those who were sick; and visits to those who were in prison. Jesus made it clear that serving others is the same as serving Christ their master!

As children of God, who are dearly loved by God, we are to come to him in prayer (the psalms are prayers) and are to serve his purpose for our lives. The mercy God offers his people was comfort because of the assurance of God’s presence, His guidance, love, and healing. This gave the people confidence. This prayer was often sung by the Israelites. It was first sung at the time of Nehemiah when the Israelites had their backs against the wall (so to speak). They were being insulted by the enemy. The presence of the Lord gave them strength as they resisted the enemies’ dehumanizing taunts.

***“Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt (Verse 3).”*** Contempt was not only present in the Old Testament of the Bible, it is alive and well today in the world. Contempt could be described as: “the feeling that a person is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn.” The Israelites felt contempt by those who hurled insults at them and ridiculed them daily.

Recently in the world, contemptuous political discourse is on the increase. In the past, political rivals and their supporters insulted their opponents mostly behind closed doors, in subdued tones that were not meant to be overheard. Now the contempt for others is spoken much more freely in the media, and whatever hesitation was present before has largely been stripped away. What we are left with is raw feelings expressed and exposed in all types of media.

The philosopher, Immanuel Kant once said that “no man in his true senses ... is candid.” Kant did value truthfulness and sincerity in our relations with one another, but he realized that to maintain the stability and encourage the progress of a moral and political community, this is dependent on our ability to hold ourselves back from expressing publicly whatever we happen to be thinking or feeling. This is especially important when our thoughts and attitudes are one of contempt for our fellow human beings. Kant was able to see that contempt is a very dangerous thing. He said that the danger of contempt lies in its ability to dehumanize its target. Public contempt is becoming more mainstream and works to undermine the moral basis of all human relationships and indeed, of human community itself.

Those who support this growing movement of contempt often believe that this kind of communication with others is more truthful and more ‘from the heart’. The truth of the matter is that often the negativity that comes out is thoughts and feelings and does not express what is true about the person. When we dismiss others, we are saying the other person is of no use to the world or their cause. That is just not true. No one’s contribution to the good of the world is solely based on their political views or whether they agree or disagree with you. Contempt shows no respect where respect is due. Just because you disagree with others, does not mean they are your enemy and useless. This kind of attitude dehumanizes others. A core feature of contempt is that it is directed at the entire person, rather than just one aspect of that person. We are not objects that can be rejected and tossed aside. I believe that this is how wars start. Leaders convince people to dismiss and dehumanize the enemy. Persecution, torture and brutality happen because of contempt of others. We are all brothers and sister of our Lord and are to treat one another as Holy and with respect. Jesus asks that his children even *love their enemies*. That is grace and quite opposite to contempt.

***“Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud (Verse 4).”*** As Christians over the ages have had disagreements over interpretations of scriptures, those on opposing sides of debate have too often treated others with contempt – causing division and splitting churches apart. Whatever the issue may have been, people who thought differently than others, about an interpretation, would too often dismiss the other side, that if they had a different view, they were no longer ‘true’ Christians. Does one’s opposing view dismiss the fact that you both agree that we are all sinners in need of the gift of Grace offered to us by Christ through His death and resurrection? Not only is this label (that the other is not a ‘true’ Christian) not accurate, but it is dangerous. We all have to be aware of our tendency to be people of contempt. No one is immune to this! We need one another to hold ourselves accountable to such behavior! We need God to help us with this because contempt is the easy way out (and we as sinners are more apt to take the easy way). We are to first love one another and rather than being judgmental and dismissive of another’s perspective, we are to be interested and try to understand why that person believes that way. We can certainly disagree and at the same time remain loving and supporting members of the family of God. This is the central purpose of the discussion groups we are currently having in our congregation. I think the rise of this culture of contempt is not in line with Christ. As believers in Christ we are to set the example to society and counter this culture of contempt.

Grace-unconditional love (and definitely not contempt) is the nature of God, and as imitators of Christ our Master, our King, we are to treat others as if they are Christ himself. Lift up your eyes, and be attentive to the needs of others, because then you are attentive to God. Help keep their cup full. “And the King will answer them: ‘Truly, I tell you, just as you have done it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 40). Amen.