

August 30, 2020

## “Our Response to Opposition” Psalm 123

FCF: Kingdom pushback

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) We should expect opposition to the gospel.  
(magnet) But our response must be shaped by the gospel.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Let’s talk about “kingdom resistance” - the pushback that arises as God’s rule asserts itself. There are countless examples of this across the world and all through history. Here’s just one. It was 445 B.C. The Jewish refugees were returning from Babylonian exile. Nehemiah led the people in rebuilding the city walls. News of this did not go well with the occupiers of the land (**READ Nehemiah 4:1-3**). Mockery, derision, hostility - this was kingdom resistance.

This is not isolated to history books or to big movements. This is very much with us today. This opposition to the gospel is something every disciple of Jesus must learn how to face.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** **Psalm 123**

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

D-Day, the Allied invasion of France that established a beachhead in Europe, ensured the end of the German war machine and the defeat of Adolf Hitler. This involved the simultaneous landing of U.S., British, and Canadian forces. It was a monumental coordinated effort - land, air, and sea. And, most importantly, it was a great success. That was June 6, 1944. But V-E Day did not come until May 8, 1945. There were 336 days between. The rapid Allied advance could not be sustained, which allowed the German army to regroup. This led to the Battle of the Bulge that winter, a surprise offensive into Belgium that was tremendously costly to both sides. The fact was that German army was anything but finished. And Hitler refused to quickly concede defeat.

The gospel is the news of the coming of the King and His kingdom into this world. It is a counter-insurgency. It is a retaking, a reclaiming and renewing, of what is already His. But this does not come immediately. That’s the message of Psalm 123. We should expect opposition. We should expect opposition to the gospel. But our response must be shaped by the gospel.

What would such a gospel-shaped response look like? This psalm shows us three things. First, the struggle with contempt. Second, the stance of the servant. Third, the need for mercy.

### **I. THE STRUGGLE WITH CONTEMPT**

This is the fourth in the “songs of ascents,” this collection of songs of pilgrims to sing on their way to the annual festivals in Jerusalem. It was not always easy (**READ Psalm 123:3-4**).

#### *A) The Reality*

The journey could be hard, not only because of the terrain but because of the reception.

#### 1. Why they felt

The psalmist speaks of contempt and scorn, despising and derision. And this was not isolated. Twice, he says they “had more than enough”. They were sated and full, unable to take any more.

2. From where it came

What was the source? Where did this come from? It's unclear. Perhaps indifferent Gentiles or unfaithful Israelites. Either way, it was deeply painful. This was really an inner wounding.

*B) The Reason*

So we have the reality of contempt. What was the reason behind this?

1. How described

Look at how it's described. From those who are "at ease" and without a care. From the "proud" and arrogant. A picture is forming. They may think themselves free but are fools in God's sight.

2. Deeper roots

The roots of this run deep. Ultimately, such self-directing and depending ways show a contempt not only for God's people but God Himself. Which is not unheard of (**READ Matthew 5:10-12**).

So we see that a gospel response begins with understanding the struggle with contempt.

*Illustration:*

Think of it this way. You've got to know what's in front of you so that you can navigate around it. If you're steering a ship through cold waters and see ice pointing through the surface, it is good to know that about 90% of an iceberg is below the waterline. You need to know that.

*Application:*

It's something like that as we face contempt and scorn. It's good to know what we're dealing with. It helps to understand why it hurts and where it comes from. Let's press in here. Assuming that we're not in the wrong and are undeserving of such a reception - for the disciple of Jesus, you can really know that it's not really about you. It's not really about you. That may be humbling. But it can also be clarifying, freeing, and focusing for your prayerful response.

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## **II. THE STANCE OF THE SERVANT**

So the first thing has to do with the contempt. The second has to do with our attitude not just towards the other party but the Lord. This is the stance of a servant (**READ Psalm 123:1-2**).

*A) Not Presuming*

The stance of a servant - this is so important. It begins with simply this - not presuming.

1. Upon His promises

Not presuming upon the Lord's promises. Yes, He hears our prayers. But we must not turn that around and take the role of the master. God is not our servant to be ordered about. He is not an old buddy to be called upon. He is not a hired expert to be consulted. We must not presume.

2. Upon our security

Not upon His promises nor upon our security. Yes, because of Christ, we now have the status of sons and daughters. And nothing can undo that. But we must not callously presume upon that.

*B) But Depending*

Ours must not be the posture of presuming but of depending, the posture of a servant.

1. The image

The image is of one party in a position to provide for the other. And of the other party looking towards them for all that they lack. In the context, it's not so much for orders but for relief.

2. The meaning

The idea being that this is the posture we are being encouraged to take. This is the song we are being led to sing. We are the servant, you and I. We are to be looking trustingly to the Lord.

A key part of the gospel response to opposition is our taking the stance of a servant.

*Application:*

Think of how otherworldly this is. What is the typical response to contempt and scorn? We want to strike back, to get back, to exact payment. What does that do? It feeds the beast. It perpetuates the cycle and keeps it fueled. But the gospel response finally breaks that cycle. It is the stance of a servant, not looking to take what is ours but looking trustingly to the Lord.

But how can we do that? We take the Lord at His word when He says, "Vengeance is mine. I shall repay." How can we know He will, that He will do justly? We look to the cross. There we see not just a show of His love but of His justice. That's how seriously He takes our sin. That's how we can know we can take Him at His word and not take things into our hands.

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### **III. THE NEED FOR MERCY**

So we see our stance towards the other party and then the Lord. Which takes us to this third point, our need for mercy. The repetition points to the importance (**READ Psalm 123:2-3**).

*A) What This Means*

1. Generally

What does this mean? Generally, mercy refers to help for one in need, a compassion in action. The Hebrew word here refers to the gracious favor of a superior to an inferior, all undeserved.

2. Specifically

Specifically, this is mercy in the form of relief from the contempt and scorn. It is bringing it to an end and enabling the people to wait, to not respond as they otherwise would. A rich mercy.

*B) Where It's From*

Where does it come from? Eyes are mentioned four times. Looking is mentioned twice.

1. Not ourselves

Where is this focus? Not upon ourselves. Not upon other people or our own inner resources.

2. But the Lord

This looking is to the LORD (**READ Psalm 123:1**). This is looking to the Almighty King over all. This is looking to and leaning upon His awesome power, the rule of the LORD our God. We are His servants and His subjects. So we look to Him for both saving and serving mercy.

The gospel response to opposition means looking to the Lord to meet our need for mercy.

*Illustration:*

One of the most painful things I have heard said is, “I don’t need your charity.” No doubt some of you have heard this. It stings because the rejection can feel so personal. It’s one of the most painful things to hear. And one of the most foolish things to say. It’s not just saying, “I don’t want to owe you” but “I’m fine on my own.” When all the while it’s obvious they are not.

*Application:*

Friends, mercy is one of God’s attributes. Need is one of ours. We desperately need to remember both and hold them together all the time. Even when it’s hard. Especially when it’s hard. These are tense times. We live in divided days. We are splintered over a global pandemic. We are quibbling over details pertaining to the obvious need for racial reconciliation. And we are fast moving into an election cycle and all the madness it will bring. I’m not going to say this is all unprecedented. I’m not sure that’s historically true. But it’s still hard. It’s still very hard.

There is much at stake here, things far more important than a cultural drift but our gospel witness. Where are we looking? To what god are we lifting our eyes? Do we see the obligations and opportunities that lie before us? Do we know our need for mercy? Do we recognize that our response should be otherworldly and that it is the only thing that can break the world’s cycle?

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**CONCLUSION:**

The restoring and reclaiming of things is rarely easy. Braces on teeth can bring a great deal of discomfort with each visit to the orthodontist. Which stands to reason, considering you are shifting the shape of your mouth. The physical therapy that comes with the repair of an injury can bring a great deal of pain as well. Some of you know I tore my ACL a few years ago playing in an adult soccer league. Days after my surgery, I was having to move that knee so as to regain strength and mobility. In all honesty, the physical therapy was far worse than the actual injury. It really was, especially early on. The restoring and reclaiming of things is rarely easy.

Let me expand on that. This principle holds true with living out the gospel. For example, seeking to make headway in a difficult relationship, struggling to learn what it is to repent, to confess, and to extend forgiveness - none of that is easy. This holds on other fronts as well. As we face down any aspect of the kingdom of Satan intruding and asserting itself in this world - the reality of disease, the pain of emptiness, the struggle of broken relationships, fighting against poverty, resisting injustice, standing against racism. The fact is we can count on a stubborn fight on any one of those fronts. Any one. The Lord is very plain on this. We see it in this psalm.

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