

Sacred practice of serving the LORD

Psalm 123

By pastor Ken Keyte

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Psalm 123

To you I lift up my eyes,
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
² 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.
³ Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
⁴ Our soul has had more than its fill
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud.

Psalm 123

A Song of Ascents.

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Sacred practice of serving the LORD

Psalm 123



*Servants of the LORD look up to their merciful
master, ready to serve him by serving others!*

You've been listening to *Psalm 123* put to the music of *Sons of Korah*.

Psalm 123 is the *fourth Psalm of Ascent* we've listened to over the past few weeks.

It's another of the *15 Psalms* sung by the *Israelite pilgrims* as they *climbed* the hot dusty road to *Jerusalem* on their way to one of the three major *worship festivals*:

Passover, Pentecost, and The feast of Tabernacles.

Like all the other *pilgrim psalms*, *Psalm 123* sings about a *sacred practice* for the *long journey of obedience towards God*, which we call *discipleship*, or being a *follower of Jesus*.

Psalm 120 taught us about the *sacred practice of repentance*.

Psalm 121 sung about the *sacred practice of trusting in God's providence*.

Psalm 122 showed us what the *sacred practice of worship* involves. And now from *Psalm 123* we discover the *sacred practice of serving God*.

2a

Servants of the LORD look up to our merciful master ready to serve him by serving others!

Looking up to our master

3

Servants of the LORD look up to
their Master – (Ps 123:1-2)

¹ To you I lift up my eyes,
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
² 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.



The *first thing* we discover about *serving God* is that *servants of the LORD look up to their master*.

When we use the expression, "*I look up to you*", we understand it as a *figure of speech* that *doesn't* literally mean *looking up* to someone taller than you, but '*looking up*' in the sense of *admiration, and awe* of someone we '*look up to*'.

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Ashley and I hiked to Wairere Falls on Monday, and when we reached the *lookout* at the base of the falls, we looked up in *admiration and awe* at the *majestic sight* of the waterfall *cascading 150 metres* down the sheer cliff face of the Kaimais.

We *lifted our eyes* in *admiration and awe* of this majestic piece of *God's handiwork* in creation.

Servants of the LORD lift up our eyes to God who is enthroned in the heavens, with an *even greater* sense of *admiration and awe* than what *Ashley and I* had at the sight of the *Wairere falls!*

But is that *really* the kind of an attitude we have for our *heaven-dwelling God* who *created the universe?*

If God was our *equal* we'd look *at* him,
If God was our *servant* we'd look *down* at him.

But God is *neither* our *equal* nor our *servant!*

Yet it's easy to get the *wrong idea* when Luke 11:9 clearly says:

"Ask and you'll get"

"Seek and you'll find"

"Knock and the door will open."

And since Jesus said he came as a *servant* then doesn't that mean he's there to *get whatever we want or need* whenever we *want it or need it?*

But God *did not* send Jesus into the world so we *could order him around* but so we could *serve our heavenly Father* like Jesus *served his heavenly Father!*

And *if we think about* it for a moment,
we *wouldn't want it any other way!*

If God *is God*, he must know *more about our needs than we do!*

If God *is God* he must be *more in touch with our thoughts, our emotions and our bodies than we are!*

and if God *is God* he must know *the interrelationships of our families, friends and communities far better than we do!*

The moment we *look up at God* and not *over at him*, or *down at him* we assume the posture of a *servant* who is *attentive* to the wishes of the *master*, and *ready* to carry out his *commands*.

Which is how the psalm describes the attitude *we should have* before the LORD, as our master whom *we serve* (not the other way round!)

Those who've heard the story of *Tarore's book* will know that the Wairere falls is the place where the young *Maori maiden Tarore* was killed. And that around her neck she carried the *gospel of Luke* in a *kete* which was taken by the *raiding party of Arawa warriors* when they killed her there as she slept.

Her death immediately sparked a *desire for utu*, but during her funeral, her father, *Chief Ngakuku*, preached *against reprisal*. Instead he called on his people to *obey what they'd learned about Jesus from Tarore's book*- And to *do what Jesus had commanded about loving our enemies and forgiving those who sin against us* and instead of *utu*, trust in the *justice and mercy of God!* Ngakuku's revolutionary act *set in motion a sequence of events* that paved the way for *reconciliation between the warring tribes*.

Ngakuku could say those words *only* because he looked up to Jesus as *Lord*, like a *servant looking up to his master*, *attentive* to his wishes and *ready to carry out his commands*, like it says in psalm 123.

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Here's some simple things to do to help us with the scared practice of serving the Lord.

- When you're *singing worship songs* in church, *close your eyes* and imagine you're *looking up to King Jesus* sitting on the *throne of heaven* as *ruler over all creation*.

- When you *pray*, refer to Jesus as "*Lord Jesus*" to acknowledge that he's the *Lord and master of your life*.
- When you *read the Bible* begin with a prayer, such as this: "*Lord Jesus, help me be attentive to your commands for my life as I read and put into practice your Word today.*"

Simple, sacred practices like these help us be *servants of the Lord who look up to our master!*

Serving a merciful master

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Hearing how Psalm 123 *likens our relationship with God* to that of *servant* (or in some translations a *slave*)- *doesn't mean* however, that we serve a *tyrant master* who drives his slaves to *exhaustion*, and *rules over them with fear!*

Nor do we serve a *policeman God* watching over the earth with *baton in hand* ready to *strike anyone who puts a foot wrong!*

As we look up to God, we see instead that we serve a *merciful master!*

The Bible describes God as being *like a potter forming and reforming the clay of our lives until finally he's shaped us into a redeemed life, made in the image of Jesus, fit for the kingdom of heaven!*

Servanthood and slavery were commonplace in Israel back when Psalm 123 was written.

But that's *not* the case for us today...or is it?

- How about becoming *enslaved to a mortgage that doesn't leave enough for living expenses?*
- How about being *enslaved to a low paying job that doesn't earn enough to pay the bills?*
- What about *enslavement to the beneficiary system that offers little incentive for earning a wage?*
- Or being a *slave to alcohol, nicotine, drugs, pornography, or compulsive work habits?*
- Enslaved to *living a lifestyle beyond our means?*
- Enslaved to *keeping up an image that isn't who we really are?*
- Enslaved to a *destructive relationship?*
- Enslaved to *obsessive consumption and compulsive spending?*

The words of Psalm 123 as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in The Message seem just as applicable for how we feel about living under these "masters" of our age.

*'We've been kicked around long enough,
Kicked in the teeth when we're down, by arrogant brutes.'*

Psalm 123 reveals to us the *startling truth* that the *real problem* we suffer from is *not in being freed from enslavement to a master, but learning to serve under a better master!*

The God we serve is a *merciful master who rules, guides, commands, loves us as his children, and who carries our destiny in his heart!*

Like the pilgrims of Psalm 123 crying out for God to *have mercy on them because they'd had enough ridicule and contempt from their arrogant oppressors,*
we too can expect *mercy from God* because he's a *merciful master!*

I've been watching Nigel Latter's documentary series "*The Hard Stuff*". **6a**

Last week he asked the hard question: "*Are we a low wage economy because we have to be to stay competitive or because we choose to be?*"

He noted that *New Zealand's productivity has increased by 50% over the last 25 years but our wages have increased by only 20%, and that half of the New Zealand work force earns less than \$25 per hour.*

Professor Tim Hazeltine reckons the idea we have to have *low wages to be competitive* is a *cultural idea*, and *not a necessity*. He went as far as saying, "*It's a shameful thing for a rich country not to pay honest hard working people a decent wage even if they're not very skilled.*"

To *check this out* Nigel Latter visited a *couple of businesses* that were paying their employees *at or above the living wage* of \$19.25 per hour.

- The first was *Tonzu*, a small family run business that *makes Tofu*. The *payoff* for them in paying their factory workers the living wage is *employer loyalty*. One of their workers said she'd been working for the company for six years and earns enough to look after her kids, and to send some money back to her parents in Samoa, and to save.
- Then he visited *Fischer & Paykell Health Care* which is the *world's leader in respiratory care products for the home*, employing *3,000 employees worldwide*. *Even their cleaners get paid above the living wage!*

All their staff earn a profit share bonus!
Not surprisingly Fischer & Paykell, like Tonzu, have no problem retaining their staff!

Neither company was a charity, both are highly profitable businesses with an ethic of only returning a profit after their workers are paid enough to adequately provide for their families.

I think we see in these examples something like the merciful master versus loyal servant relationship that God our master seeks to have with us his servants.

God isn't a mean spirited "minimum wage" kind of master who only wants to give us just enough to get by.
God is a "living wage" kind of master, who wants us to have sufficient to live on, to care for our families and to fulfil his purposes in our lives.

So when we close our eyes in worship to imagine Jesus enthroned in heaven,
when we call him by his title "Lord",
and when we ask him to help us be attentive to his commands we read in his word,
be reassured we serve a merciful master who wants the very best for our lives!

Serving God by serving others

7



However, a mistake that's crept into how we practice the Christian faith today, is separating of worshipping God from serving others.

The Bible makes no such separation!

For example Romans 12:1 says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.'

Or as Eugene Peterson puts it,

"Take your everyday, ordinary life- your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking around life- and place it before God as an offering."

What following this verse in chapters 12 to 15 of Romans are instructions that are all about serving God by serving others.

Psalm 123 simply assumes it, because they knew it well back then, that the service we offer God with our lives, is to be extended to serving others, because serving others develops naturally out of serving God.

Jesus taught his disciples this to by washing their feet and when he'd finished washing their feet he told them,

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.
I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you..."

I heard a great example of this kind of serving others in a letter I received from Gail Waenga, the other day.

Some of you will know that Gail's sister died recently after suffering a serious stroke.

Gail, has serious health issues herself and has to be on oxygen at all times.
So when she found out that her sister didn't have much time left to live, she needed someone to help her.

Roger Wilks became Gail's servant, driving her down to Wellington, camping out in the hospital so Gail could be by her sisters side 24/7, and making sure Gail had the oxygen and medication she needed, even calling for medical help one night when Gail was struggling to breathe.

Gail described in her letter how she had to communicate her sisters wishes to the rest of her family, about palliative care-which wasn't easy for her to do.

But here's the most precious part of Gail's time she had with her sister. Gail writes,

"I asked Wai if she wanted to give her life to Jesus and she responded by squeezing, and patting my hand, signifying yes. I then asked her if she wanted to confess her sins and again she responded with a yes. I prayed a blanket of angels over her and covered her with the blood of Jesus to protect and keep her safe. As I rose from her bed, I realised it was only her and I in the room. I wanted to jump around and scream and shout and then an overwhelming wave of joy came over me. I knew I could finally let her go because I was at peace knowing she was going to be with Jesus and I would see her again.

On the evening of Tuesday 13th-September-2016, I noticed my sister Wai's eyes were opened and softly looking at me. I asked her if she was ready to go, I then told her to take the hand of that Awesome Man who's waiting for her and to not be afraid because He is Jesus and He loves her. Her final breaths were so peaceful I was a little jealous.

Gail closed her letter by saying,

"There are too many other things to mention where I saw God's hand at work sustaining me through this time, all my praise goes to Him, and I thank you all for your prayer coverage, messages of sympathy, hugs and sharing your love with us.

God bless, with much love and sincere thanks from Isaac and

Gail.

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Servants of the LORD look up to our merciful master ready to serve him by serving others!

This is how we carry out *the sacred practice of serving the Lord!*