

**Psalm 123: 1-4; "Unto You I lift up my Eyes", A Sermon for
the New Year, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on January 4th, 2009,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Sometimes I wish that the translators of the New King James and the New American Standard versions of the Bible had never taken the "Thees" and "Thous" out of the Bible. Reading this text and preaching from it, I can sense the weakness of simply using the word "You". Who does the "You" refer to? It most certainly refers the majestic Deity; our great and holy, our wise and loving Lord. But unless the word "You" would have been capitalized, we can imagine some young student in Scriptural things easily might think as he read these words, of an angel, or a saint who had died, or Mary, or some other personage who now dwells in the heavens. But our God has anticipated this weakness and has clearly let us understand who the "You" refers to when in the 2nd verse the Psalmist says, "So our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us!" I take these words to be the words of a prayer to God which are the words of the Psalmist stating not only his own desire that the Lord would answer him, but also that the Lord would answer the heart cries of all of His people who were sincerely trying to live their lives to serve God, seeing Him as their Master. This is why I believe that this text is an appropriate one to preach from on the afternoon of the first Lord's Day of the New Year. For if there is anything that we need to learn in our Christian walk, living in this day and this time of the history of the Christian Church, it is just this; that the life of a Christian is the life of serving God as a Master and Lord. It is not just that we have been brought into right relationship with God through the finished work of Jesus Christ. It is not just that we have been delivered from the wrath to come and have been given an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and reserved in heaven for us. These are great privileges indeed, and should never be forgotten. They should be meditated upon often. But the truth which is often forgotten by many Christians in our day and time is that we are servants of the Living God. A Christian is not one who simply is serving himself, or living to himself. He is living to God's glory. And so we want to ask the question this afternoon, "How does the Christian serve God in such a way that God his Master will hear his prayers to bring glory to Him in every situation of life?" For the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 3: 23, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." Our eternal inheritance was purchased for us by Christ, but there are rewards attached to it which are based upon our service to our God and our Christ. Paul was addressing earthly servants serving their earthly masters, but surely the truth is plain to all who would serve Christ their Master. It is the eyes of a servant which are primarily spoken of in these verses. The servant of the Lord is described first of all as lifting his eyes to God, then, second, looking to hand of his master, and then finally,

looking until God has mercy. These looks to God our Master are the model and pattern for all faithful servants of the living God who would have his prayers answered. So let us think about them together and put them into practice in our lives.

1st - The eyes lifted up to heaven.

"Unto You I lift up my eyes, of You who dwell in the heavens." The prayer of a servant of God begins with the lifting up of his eyes to God who is heaven. God is very concerned with where our eyes go, and what it is that we are looking at. In Psalm 119, verse 37, the author pleads this way with God in prayer, "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way." In prayer there is a lifting up of the eyes from the earthly things that preoccupy us, to look away in faith to the Almighty God. When we say, "Let us look to the Lord in prayer, it is not a physical looking up. The head may be bowed while the eyes of the heart may be looking up. If we are seeking God that He might forgive us our sins, we should remember the posture and the eyes of the publican in Jesus' parable in Luke 18: 13. "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'" With his body he could not lift up his eyes to heaven. He was ashamed of himself and blamed himself exceedingly for the sinful things that he had done. And even if in his heart, he did not feel that he could lift up the eyes of his heart in prayer, nevertheless he was looking to God to hear him. But when God takes away our sins and rolls away the reproach of them in his sight, we read of the result in Psalm 34: 4 and 5, "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." "They looked to Him and were radiant and their faces were not ashamed." In prayer we are consciously lifting up the eyes of our heart to give our attention to God; to bring our ourselves into conscious conversation and interaction with the One who is in heaven. But because of Christ's grace, and the Holy Spirit within us, God Himself is always with us. When we pray, we consciously remember to reverence God in our thoughts and words to Him. For He is in heaven and we are upon the earth. Turn with me to Ecclesiastes Chapter 5. "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil." The sacrifice of fools would be a prayer which God cannot hear. Solomon goes on to describe. "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God." "For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few." "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words." What is he saying here? God is in heaven, that perfect place and dimension where He resides, outside of your sight, but very near to you, even though you cannot see Him. Do not hastily address Him when you have not thought about what you will say. Order your way and your thoughts and your words aright. But do not hesitate to lift up the eyes of your heart to Him. In Proverbs Chapter 15, verse 8 it says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight."

I like the wording of the old New American Standard version at this point. "To Thee I lift up my eyes, O Thou who art enthroned in the heavens!" God is enthroned in the heavens, and in Psalm 22, verse 3 in the same version it says, "Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel." Let me ask you if you see Him by faith, in your mind's eye, and your heart's gaze as seated upon the throne of grace as your Master and your King? Oh, that you would lift up your eyes to Him in faith and in prayer more, this year, than ever before. Surely He is worthy of all of your praise, and all of your sincere obedience. He dwells in heaven and He is enthroned, and inhabits, the praises of His people.

2ndly - The eyes of a servant of the Lord are described as looking to the hand of their master. (Verse 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." Now this is a picture drawn from the reality of a servant's duty to their master or mistress in Old Testament times. Indeed where servitude was a reality for thousands of years as an institution, God commanded that servants obey their masters; and not simply with eye-service. I quoted to you verse 23 of Colossians 3 at the beginning of this message, but listen to verse 22. "Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God." Then verse 23, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ." These are very interesting words. Slaves almost never received an earthly inheritance. It was sons in the family that received the earthly inheritance. Turn over with me to John chapter 8, verse 31. Here Jesus is speaking to some Jews who the text back in verse 31 said, had believed in Him." But Jesus tests them by this statement of truth. "If you abide in my word, you are My disciples indeed." "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Those Jews who were opposing Jesus and His teaching said in verse 33, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone." "How can you say, 'You will be made free?'" "Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.'" "And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever." "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you." In other words, there were many of these Pharisees and others who said that they believed in Jesus, but upon closer examination by the Master they are found not to be His servants, but the servants of sin and the Devil.

But the kind of eye-service that is being commended for us in our text in Psalm 123 is the kind of service where the eyes of the servant are looking intently to the master or mistress, and the slightest gesture of the hand was enough to indicate the master or the mistress's will, and the servant, always alert and looking for that, immediately went about to do their will. This is the kind of service that our Lord Jesus Christ, and His Father, and the Holy Spirit are looking for from you. In the

writings of men from the past there are descriptions of what servants were like in their service. A writer named Maundrell, speaking of an interview with the Pasha at Tripoli, says, "The servants all stood in great numbers with the utmost respect, and in profoundest silence, and served the guests with the utmost attention and respect." Pococke remarks that in Egypt the slaves stand in the profoundest silence at the end of the table, their hands laid cross-wise over one another, and that they mark with the deepest attention the slightest movement of their master, who conveys his wishes to them through signs and winks. Savary, in his Letters from Egypt says, "The slaves stand with their hands laid cross-wise over their breasts, silent, at the end of the hall. Their eyes are directed to the master, and they are attentive to the slightest indication of his will." This, I say, is what is being described for us by the Psalmist as the finest attitude of believers in God, and in our case, in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are those who are to receive an inheritance from the Lord. We are those for whom He died, and therefore owe Him the life of our eternal soul, the strength of our body, and therefore all of our ambitions ought to be to bring Him glory and to forward His kingdom of righteousness. We are servants; but by Christ's grace, we have come to be willing servants. Our eyes look to Him to do His will. But you will say to me, "But I cannot see my Master's slightest gestures." "How can I know and do His will?" He is in heaven, and I am upon the earth. Remember the words from John 8 earlier? "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." When you trust in the Lord Jesus, and desire to live out the truth of His word, you are His servant forever.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 15: 12. "If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you." "And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress." "From what the Lord has blessed you with, you shall give to him." "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today." "And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever." "Also to your female servant shall you do likewise." The Lord Jesus, our Master and Lord remembers His sufferings at the cross, His overcoming the world, the flesh, and the Devil there; and as a result He has redeemed us and set us free. Our response, if we love Him and His house, and His people, is that we greatly desire to serve Him. We are willing to suffer our ear being spiritually "bored to the door of His house" and abide in the truth of the word even if we have to suffer for it. Our service to Christ is not grievous; it is not burdensome; but rather it is joyful.

Now we look to His hand continually to see what He would have us to do. Let me ask you this afternoon if you are praying continually asking your Lord and

Master what He would have you to do to serve Him? "Lord, what would you have me to do?" There is real joy in this kind of service and it will lead to more fellowship with God's people and a greater witness to Christ Himself when you take upon you the yoke of service to Jesus Christ. This is what I pray will become a reality in the midst of this church in this coming year. If this perspective is adopted, by faith, and lived out, this church cannot but help growing in grace, in wisdom, in love, and even in numbers.

Then finally - The servant of the Lord is described for us here as looking until God has mercy.

"So our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us." It takes the Lord having mercy upon His people; people who are desirous to keep His commandments, and do His good will; so that they will have success in their every attempt in doing it. If we were able simply to go about doing our Lord's will without His help, without His power, without His grace; it would only lend itself to pride. "Look, Lord, this is what I am doing for You." Instead of such great self-confidence being cultivated in God's people; our loving Lord Jesus actually permits them to go through the experience of being despised and rejected of men, even as He did. "Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on!" "For we are exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud." Here is where all the glory goes to God for the things that we do. It is when our eyes continue to look to Him until He has mercy on us. And when that mercy comes; for it is never if that mercy comes, but when that mercy comes; the soul which is trusting and looking to Jesus shall never fail to find it. It may be longer in coming than they would have it, but God's timing in everything is perfect. If we have to endure the scorn and the contempt of the proud; those who think that they owe it all to themselves; if we have to endure the scorning of those who are ease; those who will never lift a finger in God's service; it will be proved to us at the end of our life, and at the end of the world when Christ returns, that it has all been worth it.

Where are your eyes looking? Are they lifted up to heaven where Jesus is, seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty? Are they looking at His hand to see what He would have you to do? Are they looking to the Lord your God until He has mercy on you? That is the way that you found your Savior in the beginning of your walk with Him. That is the way that you should continue until He calls you to be with Himself forever. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross and despised the shame of suffering for you. He who is your Savior is also your Master. And He who is your Master is also your friend. Jesus says in John 15: 14, "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you." "No longer do I call your servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." The old hymn says:

"Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus, just from sin and self to cease; just from Jesus

simply taking, life and rest, and joy and peace." "I'm so glad I've learned to trust you; Jesus, Savior, Master, friend; and I know that Thou art with me, wilt be with me to the end." "Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!" "How I've proved him o'er and o'er!" "Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!" "O for grace to trust Him more!"