



GROWING UP IN GOD
A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

Session 4 April 2011

'Like servants, we are watching and waiting...'

Psalm 123

¹*To You I lift up my eyes,
O You who are enthroned in the heavens!*
²*Behold, 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 is gracious to us.*
³*Be gracious to us, O LORD, be gracious to us,
For we are greatly filled with contempt.*
⁴*Our soul is greatly filled
With the scoffing of those who are at ease,
And with the contempt of the proud.*

In this, the fourth psalm on our journey of ascent, we find the psalmist again, looking up into the eyes of his Lord and Master - the only place from which help will come...his cry is *'as the eyes of servants look to their master'* - we will look to You until help comes...losing his rag at the end, he allows himself some frustration at His Lord's seeming delay - we can't take any more abuse - we've had enough of dwelling in the tents of Kedar...surrounded by the ungodly...come quickly O God and save us...be gracious to us, be merciful, see our plight and deliver us...

The disciples would echo this hundreds of years later -

John 6:68 – 69 The Message

⁶⁸⁻⁶⁹*Peter replied, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God."*

We're stuck Lord, we're committed to this journey, we've left everything to follow You...there's no going back...so we look up – and the moment we do we assume the posture of servitude...He is God, we are His servants, He knows best.

So, having looked up, the psalmist goes on to liken himself to the servant and the master, whose eyes are fixed on that Master – for us, service begins with that upward gaze – woe to us if we go to serve before we have stood before the Master and obtained His orders.

But, most of us just can't stand having to wait.

Ask us to do anything, but to wait, Lord, have a heart!

Here David likens our waiting to servants standing before a Great King, waiting for Him to speak, commission them, waiting for Him to bring the deliverance they so desire...but the King keeps them there...waiting.

The scene David depicts is of a Great Monarch with servants ranged around the room, waiting His bidding. He Himself is seated on the Throne... do they keep running to Him saying 'O King, is there anything You desire today?' 'O King, shall I go and fetch...?' 'O King, what is your wish?'

I think not.

They stand, attentive, watching, waiting '*as the eyes of a servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to and hand of her mistress*'.

Have you ever heard someone in church say '*let's do something,*' even if it is the wrong thing...doing something cost Saul the kingdom...he was told to wait, but the pressure from the people and his desire to keep their allegiance, his fear of the Philistines, caused him to take precipitate action, which lost him the throne...

1 Samuel 13:8 – 14 NASB

⁸Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. ⁹So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. ¹¹But Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, ¹²therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favour of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering." ¹³Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴"But now your kingdom shall not endure The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

God looked for someone likeminded...and He found David...

One of the things we must first learn in our ascent is to wait well.

If we are ever going to be of any use to the Lord, waiting is a skill, an art, we will have to perfect. In fact, you will find you will spend more of your time waiting than actually doing anything...so we wait...not impatiently, not tapping our fingers or our feet, at peace, we wait, eyes fixed on Him, waiting His good pleasure – as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress...

Service and waiting...and sometimes He extends it a little...stretching our faith...

And expectancy – David was expectant of the Lord's great mercy. The NIV uses the word 'mercy' in place of grace...mercy includes loving-kindness, the loving-kindness of the Lord which is from everlasting to everlasting.

So David waits for the loving-kindness of the Lord, which he knew so well, to relieve him in the strait place in which he found himself.

Have you ever been in a strait place?

Everything is shut up to you and you are shut up with God.

There is no other place to turn – you have to wait His good pleasure and His loving-kindness...

The message says it like this –

*'We're watching and waiting, holding our breath,
awaiting your word of mercy.
Mercy, God, mercy!'*

Andrew Murray put it like this – calling it 'Loyalty to that One Master'

'Let me say, first, He brought me here, it is by His will that I am in this strait place – in that fact I will rest. Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child. Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He needs to bestow. Last, in His good time, He can bring me out again – how and when, He knows. Let me say I am here:

- 1. By God's appointment*
- 2. In His keeping*
- 3. Under His training*
- 4. For His time*

The psalmist's prayer is not an attempt to get God to do what He is unwilling to do, but a reaching out to what he knows God wants to do and He does do. It is a longing expressed to receive what God is doing in and for us through Jesus Christ.

In obedience, we pray *'mercy'* instead of *'give me what I want'* because we know He pities us, He has mercy upon us, He knows our frame, He is compassionate, He is gracious, He is full of loving-kindness...He is altogether lovely...and we are secure in our relationship with Him, child to Father, trusting, holding His hand, looking up, knowing He hears and He will respond...even if His timing, is not ours...

Waiting, watching, and waiting well. Expectant, thankful, because we know He hears and knows what is best for us and will not hold back from giving us that which is right.

So David looks up, cries out, holds on, and waits, and waits and waits...

Bob Mumford tells the story of being at a weeklong conference, everything was happening, people were being healed, it was wonderful. Came the last evening at which he was due to speak, nothing came during the afternoon, he was convinced God would give him something, even if it was just as he mounted the platform...nothing! What should he do, draw on something he already knew...or wait?

He stood there and finally said to the Pastor *'I have nothing to say'* the pastor jumped up and began to prophesy *'You have seen an object lesson this night, it is not of man that runs or man that wills, but God that shows mercy'* ...they waited on...as they did so the Lord spoke to Bob and said *'Ask that lady in the black hat at the back to play the piano'* – he did so. He didn't even know if she could play the piano...she removed her hat, came to the front, took her seat, placed her hands on the keys and the glory of God fell...she was a backslidden believer who came home to Father's House that night.

The point he makes is that if God had done that to him years before, he would have said *'If You don't have anything to say, I'll take care of it myself!'*

Most of God's dealings with us are designed to cause us to become dependent upon Him and Him alone...so we must wait His timing...

As the eyes of a servant look to the Master...so our eyes are on You...until...

In the morning, be ready, come up, present yourself...

Exodus 34:2 NIV 2011

² *Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain.* ³ *No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain;'*

Moses, called up into the Presence of the Lord, sees His glory pass by...

⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

⁸ Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. ⁹ "Lord," he said, "if I have found favour in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us."

Exodus 33:14

¹⁴ The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

What is His purpose in all our trials of waiting, wanting and wishing? It is that He might give us rest...that we might rest from trying to do it ourselves, work it out ourselves, be the answer to our own problem, it is that He might be our all in all – we are His inheritance, and He is ours. He longs for us to be totally dependent as a child upon its Father, trusting, resting, waiting...

Oh God, grace me!

Most of us cannot wait unless God puts us through a time of enforced waiting – waiting conditions us to receive what He wants to give and prevents us from running with it before time, when He does give it...it is the difference between religious activity and true spirituality.

Moses, called up to the mount and God says 'just come up Mo, don't worry about the rent, don't worry about grandma, don't worry about the missis or the kids...just come up and – wait.' And it is seven days before the Lord speaks -

Exodus 24:12 - 18

¹² The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction." ¹³ Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. ¹⁴ He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them." ¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. ¹⁸ Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.'

The Lord's servant presented himself as he was commanded...wait here he said to the elders, with Aaron and Hur...

Whilst Moses is learning to wait...the people grew impatient...let's do something, even if it is wrong...and it was...

Service is inexorably linked with the ability to wait, and wait in confident expectation without taking the law into our own hands.

While we are running around in circles, God couldn't speak to us if He wanted to...we need to discover His presence and majesty, and wait quietly and confidently before Him, thanking Him that He knows the answer to our petition, and He will speak in due time.

Confident expectation.

The psalm has nothing in it about serving others – it concentrates entirely on our relationship to God. Its position is that if the attitude of servant-hood is learned by attending to God as Lord, then serving others will develop from this. We will hear His commands to be hospitable to others, to love one another, to be compassionate and gracious, to help and to heal...but we will have put the first commandment first, to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and then go on to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

We will have learnt the art of abiding, of security, identity and belonging because we have spent time in the Presence of the Lord, waiting His pleasure and will.

Acts 7:30 – 34 paraphrase

'After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai....Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

Forty years in the back side of the desert, keeping sheep – good training for leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, so often the Lord calls us aside from our work for a season and bids us be still and learn before we go forward again to minister. There is no time lost in such waiting –

'Fleeing from his enemies, the ancient knight found that his horse needed to be reshod. Prudence seemed to urge him on without delay, but higher wisdom taught him to halt a few minutes at the blacksmith's forge by the way, to have the shoe replaced, and although he heard the feet of his pursuers galloping hard behind, yet he waited those minutes until his charger was refitted for his flight. And then, leaping into his saddle, just as they appeared a hundred yards away, he dashed away from them with the fleetness of the wind and knew that his halting had hastened his escape...'

Are you champing at the bit right now because you have prophetic words that seem no closer to being fulfilled than they were when they were spoken?

Be at peace beloved child, His ways of preparation are not ours, and He will not let us run ahead of Him...and if we have been working and have been laid aside for a season, so often God bids us 'stay' before we go, so we may fully recover for the next stage of the journey...

J Danson Smith put it this way -

Waiting! Yes, patiently waiting!
Till the next steps made plain shall be;
To hear, with the inner hearing,
The Voice that will call for me.

Waiting! Yes, hopefully waiting!
With hope that need not grow dim;
The Master is pledged to guide me,
And my eyes are unto Him.

Waiting! Expectantly waiting!
Perhaps it may be today,
The Master will quickly open
The gate to my future way

Waiting! Yes, waiting! Still waiting!
I know, though I have waited long,
That, while He withholds His purpose
His waiting cannot be wrong

Waiting! Still waiting!
The Master will not be late;
He knoweth that I am waiting
For Him to unlatch the gate.'

Watching, waiting, service – mercy - feed on His goodness and loving-kindness while you wait His good pleasure beloved, this time is not wasted...soon the activity will begin again and you will need the strength you have gained here at this stopping place, for the climb that lies ahead of you...

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