

## **Psalm 123 "The Servant Teaches the Master the Pattern of Discipleship"**

This psalm was more than likely written by or from the perspective of a slave, written by someone at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. The crowd going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast would have been a mixed crowd, included would be slaves and free people, masters and servants. All of them would be singing this song. There will be some for whom this psalm may for various reasons be expressing their own hearts cry, however for the vast majority of us we are simply listening in – so the sermon and the questions are exploring what it would look like to truly hear the cry of this psalm.

### **Read Psalm 123**

1. (vs. 3-4) What is it that causes the most distress for the psalmist? Why is it that such things go right down to the soul (vs. 4), to the very core of who a person is?

*Contempt, scorn, treated with an air of prideful superiority.*

*This posture goes right to the core of who a person because it diminishes the humanity of the other because they lack something the other possesses – in this case of a servant to a master – it would be that they lack wealth, power, position, privilege.*

2. Part of truly hearing the cry of the oppressed is to honestly ask the question – do I in my attitude, behavior, or words make others feel how the psalmist feels? When you reflect on such a question what bubbles up to the surface?

*This unedited excerpt from the sermon may help in opening up the conversation on this front. As this is a personal question that expresses vulnerability be prepared as a leader to set the tone with your own self reflection.*

*"The raw materials for such a posture resides in every single human heart – right? – for example when we see wrong in another person – we don't focus on what we have in common with them – to realize we are just as capable of such things - we seem to automatically focus on what makes us different.*

*Let's say you are a woman and a man tries to control you – there is often the temptation to say – he's a bully because he's a man – because that's where we're different – we don't say that's how human beings are – we say that's how men are – contempt.*

*Or you are a man and a woman deceives you – there is often a great temptation to say – she is deceptive because she's a woman – because that is where you're different – you don't say that's how we as human beings are – you say that's how women are – contempt.*

*Let's say you are wealthy and you get scammed by a poor person – there is the temptation to say – poor people are scammers – because that is where you are*

*different – you don't say that's how we as human beings are – you say that's how poor people are – contempt.*

*Or you are poor and you get pushed around by a wealthy person – there is the temptation to say – wealthy people are entitled - because that is where you are different – you don't say that's how we as human beings are – you say that's the way wealthy people are – contempt.*

*Or you get into a political debate in person or on social media and it goes sideways devolving into the slinging of aspersions – responses based on unfounded assumptions – there is the temptation to say - that's the way the left is – elitist snowflakes – or we say that's the way the right is - racist bigots – because that's where we are different – we don't say that's the way human beings are – we say that's the way the left is – or that's the way the right is - contempt*

Part of the antidote to such prideful contempt is found in the Psalm. The language of the Psalm moves from an I to a we. The psalmist is inviting everyone to learn from the slave the posture of coming before God rightly as a servant to a Lord King.

3. What impact does it have on our hearts to learn from those who we might believe we are smarter than, spiritually more attune than, morally superior to? How does it change our relationship with that person?

*Such a posture forms in us humility.*

*Such a posture exposes in us our pride, bigotry, judgmental heart as those things will come to the surface in the process of learning from the other. This gives us the opportunity to acknowledge them before God in repentance and experience his forgiveness and the transforming work of the Spirit.*

*Such a posture upends the pride in our differences as we move through considering others to be equal with us, to considering others better than ourselves.*

*Accepting what God is revealing to us through that person leads us to accept the other, and to be formed to serve them in humility.*

4. Of all the metaphors used in the bible to describe our relationship with God, that of a servant to a King is our least favorite. Why is that?

*Freedom is a highly prized state in our culture. No one has the right to tell me what to do! I am the captain of my own ship, the master of my own destiny. We define freedom as the absence of any constraint on our choices. To serve God is to have constraints on our freedom of choice...*

The question is not whether we are serving something or not, the question is what are we serving? For we are all serving something, we are all enslaved to something, something is ultimately driving us – be it career, wealth, beauty, comfort, male / female affection, success etc. and such things are cruel

taskmasters – they are never satisfied - always keeping us striving, chasing, performing, worrying.

5. What is it that our society is serving? What are you serving? What impact does that have on your heart and life?

*The preamble to this question above will give some suggestions for where the conversation could go.*

*This is a personal reflection question that again necessitates some openness and vulnerability with one another. Again it would be important for you as a leader to have an answer ready to go to set the tone and trajectory.*

**Read John 13:3-5; 12-17**

6. The Psalmist tells us that when we are serving God we can expect mercy. It is Jesus who reveals perfectly the heart of God's mercy. What is the character of the King we are serving? What does it look like to serve this King?

*He is the King who has come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:35-45)*

*He is the King who takes the posture of the lowest of the low servant in the household by stooping to unbuckle the sandals of his disciples and washing their feet. This was the most menial degrading task in the ancient world that only the lowest of the low could / would do. This is the posture of our King.*

*Such an action was a pointer to what he would do upon the cross – washing us clean of sin through his death.*

*Jesus in this action also invites us to this kind of love and service of the other. To lay aside our pride, to do whatever is necessary to serve the other.*