



The Songs of Ascent: God's Roadtrip Playlist

Lesson 4 - Psalms 123 and 124

"Does anyone need the restroom?!"

Before we get going with this lesson...

... any comments or questions from last week?

... did you do the homework?

TURNING THE CAR ON. On a long road trip, would you rather be the driver or a passenger?

Let's have two volunteers read Psalms 123 and 124. (NIV printed on the last page.)

As you listen, think about the following things.

- What parallelism do you note? Of what type(s)?
- Are you using a different Bible translation? Do you note any differences?
- What names or concepts are mentioned with which you're unfamiliar?

Consider also what connects these two psalms. What themes or ideas are expressed to bridge them?

Psalms 120 and 121 were spoken by one singular pilgrim. Psalm 122 featured that singular pilgrim referencing a group with whom s/he was traveling. What do you notice in Psalms 123 and 124 which further develops this trend?

Open the red hymn book in front of you to page 19 (at the front). We'll split into two groups for this exercise.

GROUP A - Have a volunteer read the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. What do you see taught in Psalm 123 which is reflected in the First Article? After talking this over, go to the third point in this exercise.

GROUP B - Have a volunteer read the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. What do you see taught in Psalm 124 which is reflected in the Second Article? After talking this over, go to the third point in this exercise.

BOTH GROUPS - In your groups (not with the whole class yet), consider this question. Where is the Holy Spirit's work being reflected in Psalms 123 and 124? Consider the following verse as well.

Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Psalm 123 confesses our absolute reliance on God in very dramatic, vivid terms. Article One of the Apostles' Creed does so also. In what ways do you see our reliance on God also reflected throughout another regular feature of our liturgy; the Lord's Prayer? (You can find that printed on page 20 in the hymnal.)

Our sinful nature (what Lutherans sometimes call "the Old Person" or "the Old Adam") is disgusted by God's claims to sovereignty over us. This image of God as our master in Psalm 123 is revolting to the Old Person. (See also Romans 1-2 and 7.) The psalmist, therefore, specifically calls God "the LORD" twice in this psalm.

- What do you know about the significance of this name of God?
- How does considering that specific name of God, "the LORD," feed the "New Man" (the believing heart created in us by the Spirit) with the Gospel?

In verse 3, the pilgrims pray that God the Creator “have mercy” on them. To “have mercy” on someone is to show them kindness and love which they had not earned or deserved; more pointedly, to show that kindness and love to someone whom you have a right to punish. Why is this always an appropriate prayer for humans to offer to God?

Our common worship service used to have the song “Lord, Have Mercy¹” as a part of the confession of sins. We were saying to God, “Have mercy on us despite our sins. Forgive us.” (You can see this on page 15 of the hymnal.) This was and is a good prayer. Yet the new hymnal will now use “Lord, Have Mercy” as part of the general prayer, not simply as a confession of sin. **What things does this teach you, or of what things does this remind you, about your relationship with God?**

Mark 10:46-52 is one biblical example of the broader use of “have mercy.”

When we read the Psalms, we remember the importance of parallel statements and ideas in Hebrew poetry. “Arrogant” and “proud” people are mentioned in 123:4 as the enemies abusing Israel. If “arrogance” and “pride” define the church’s enemies, what are some words you would use to define the church?

In what ways does Psalm 124 reemphasize our reliance on God, which was a particular theme in 123?

What happens to the church (Israel) in Psalm 124? What happens to the church’s enemies?

What should we expect God to do with the church’s enemies in the world?

¹ This song is often called the *Kyrie*, which is the Greek word for “Lord.” Sometimes the phrase “Lord, have mercy” is left untranslated as “Kyrie, eleison.”

Homework!

These psalms are confessions of faith and prayers of praise. Psalm 123 exalts God as our master and lord, who is also our faithful and merciful help. Psalm 124 praises God's saving action. We remind ourselves weekly of these truths in worship to feed and strengthen our faith in our Savior-God. But there's no reason to only do this on Sunday!

This week, make the Apostles' Creed part of your prayers. When you pray, read it before praying. (Recite it, if you know it by heart.) Then bring your prayers to God, having been reminded of his powerful and saving love by these ancient words of praise from the saints who have gone before us.

Also, make the Lord's Prayer part of your routine. I personally like to pray the Lord's Prayer as part of my morning routine; make coffee, sit down with devotional reading, and pray before I begin my reading. We also pray it before bed with our kids. Wherever it fits in your day, use the Lord's Prayer to continually remind yourself of God's love and care for you, and your reliance on him. The Holy Spirit does and will work through the Word of God to strengthen your faith, and the Lord's Prayer is God's Word for you!

Closing Prayer.

Lord God, our sinful natures balk at praying to you because they hate asking for help. They refuse to acknowledge your claim over us. But by the death of your Son Jesus you have made us your own. Without Jesus, we were and would ever be lost. But because of your saving love we are and will ever be safe. We ask you that every day you make us grow in humility and faith. Help us in all our troubles, Lord God. We have no hope outside of you; but in you your saints have everlasting hope. Amen.

Psalm 123

- 1 I lift up my eyes to you,
to you who sit enthroned in heaven.
- 2 As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the LORD our God,
till he shows us his mercy.
- 3 Have mercy on us, LORD, have mercy on us,
for we have endured no end of contempt.
- 4 We have endured no end
of ridicule from the arrogant,
of contempt from the proud.

Psalm 124

- 1 If the LORD had not been on our side—
let Israel say—
- 2 if the LORD had not been on our side
when people attacked us,
- 3 they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;
- 4 the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,
- 5 the raging waters
would have swept us away.
- 6 Praise be to the LORD,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
- 7 We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.