

# Psalm Sundays

Text  
Psalm 123

Topic  
The psalmist compares believers  
to a servant carefully beholding his or her  
master's hand for subtle signals

Title  
***"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"***

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*"Show me your hands."*

You're almost certain to hear that shouted at a suspect in any cop show. One of the first things I learned as a Chaplain on a ride-along was to observe a person's hands - *because that is where they'll be holding the weapon.*

*"Show me your hands"* might be followed by, *"Put your hands up,"* then, *"Put your hands behind your head."*

When Quint first meets Hooper in *Jaws*, he demands, "Gimme your hands." Then Quint grabs Hooper's wrists and looks at his hands and examines them. "You've got city boy hands, Hooper. You been countin' money all your life."

1 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



Can you remember the last time you used hand signals while driving your car? The military utilizes tactical hand-signals. Most everyone understands that a bent-elbow, raised clenched fist means "Stop." Raise that clenched fist with a straight arm overhead, head down, and it communicates something very different.

A good doctor observes your hands. There are many medical reasons your hands might shake. My hands shake. Is it from too much caffeine, or too little dopamine?

In *Terminator 3*, Arnold walks through a mini-mart filling a basket with junk food. When the clerk asks him if he is going to pay for it, Arnold ominously extends his hand and says, "Talk to the hand."

**Hands are prominent in Psalm 123. The psalmist doesn't want to talk to the hand. He wants to *behold* it.**

Psa 123:2 **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, Until He has mercy on us.

The psalmist wants to behold the LORD's hand the way a faithful servant beholds the master's hand in order to receive guidance and instruction.

We are servants of the Lord. We, too, ought to passionately desire to behold His hand.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Behold The Lord's Hand Until He Signals His Mercy To You**, and **#2 Behold The Lord's Hand Until You Show His Mercy Through You**.

2 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



## #1 - Behold The Lord's Hand Until He Signals His Mercy To You (v1-2)

My shaking hands. It's not from too much caffeine. You may not believe me, but I don't drink all that much coffee in a day:

- ☞ I have one cup, a pour-over, in the morning.
- ☞ I might have a shot of espresso, or a Turkish, midmorning. A shot isn't some crazy caffeine overload. It only contains the amount of caffeine in a regular 8oz cup of coffee.
- ☞ I might have a mid-afternoon coffee, but not always.

I do love the different ways of making coffee, and the gadgets associated with it.

### **I shake because I have too little dopamine; and that is from Parkinson's Disease.**

Technically (and I quote), "The main pathological characteristics of Parkinson's Disease are cell **death** in the **brain's** basal ganglia."

It confirms what you've always suspected: *I'm brain dead.*

My initial diagnosis was about two years ago. It's no secret; I just didn't want to make a huge deal of it.

It has opened up new ministry: This year at our annual Apples of Gold, they've asked me to demonstrate Shake&Bake cooking.

Honestly, I figured that one day it would be an appropriate illustration in a study. It fits today. And now we can have some fun with it.

3 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



Psa 123:1 A Song of Ascents. Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.

The Songs of Ascent are Psalms 120-134. They were the travel playlist for pilgrims on their way up the hill to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate one of the annual feasts.

In the previous psalm, the pilgrim said, "Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!" (v2). Now within the city, his gaze turned even higher, to God's dwelling in the heavens.

The psalmist looked heavenward, then, in verse two, talked about the kind of humble servant he desired to become. Seeing God, he wanted to be rededicated to serving God.

It reminds me of Isaiah. He recorded his famous vision of God:

Isa 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple.

Isa 6:2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Isa 6:3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

In his vision Isaiah was rededicated for service as a coal from the altar touched his lips. Isaiah uttered those famous words, "Here am I. Send me" (v8).

Your serving is an outgrowth of your 'vision' of Jesus. I don't mean that you'll be transported to Heaven, like Isaiah was. It's how you envision His nature and character. If you are not serving the Lord; or if your service seems empty, or a

4 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



burden... You're not really looking at the Suffering Servant who substituted Himself for you, in order to save you.

Psa 123:2 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, Until He has mercy on us.

The picture the psalmist refers us to is that of a servant who is so attentive to his master, or to her mistress, that they respond to subtle finger and hand signals that guests of the household may not even see. They don't ever have to be told what to do.

If you've been a leader, or a supervisor... Have you had the joy of having a subordinate assistant that seemed to always know what you wanted done, and how to accomplish it?

Or are you always finding it necessary to assist your assistants?

Iron Man had Jarvis, then Friday, as his AI assistants. They could anticipate his needs. The psalmist wants to be that in tune with the LORD.

Christians tend to think of serving as if they were in an episode of *Downton Abbey*. Everything is expected to be absolutely perfect. They labor, they toil, to a point of exhaustion. They are constantly anxious. Inevitably, something, a drinking glass, is spotted, or spilled, to everyone's shame.

If you ever feel as though you're serving Jesus that way, something is wrong. You're either putting a burden on yourself, or someone is trying to burden you. I'll throw out giving as an example. Churches have many techniques to burden you about your financial giving. Isn't it better to let the Lord lead you in your giving?

5 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



As a side note: I think Christians can be afraid to let the Lord lead. I mean, what if He asks you to be extra generous, or to give in a way you'd never have dreamed of?

Jesus will lead you by His Word, reinforced by the still, small, gracious voice of the Holy Spirit Who indwells you.

There is another illustration in the Bible that captures this same idea of subtle servant signals:

Psa 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.

Psa 32:9 Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule, *Which* have no understanding, *Which* must be harnessed with bit and bridle...

In this case, the horse or the mule are the servant. Some are so in tune with their rider that even the slightest turn of the head is felt by them and they respond.

Verse two ends, "So our eyes *look* to the LORD our God, Until He has mercy on us."

"Mercy," by definition, cannot be earned or deserved. Secondly, God is *always* merciful. Even in His righteous wrath He remembers mercy.

You may not 'see' the Lord's mercy right away. In fact, you might think there is no mercy in your situation. A servant is to wait on the Lord until he or she *perceives* His mercy.

6 of 11

Psalm 123

"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"



For example: It's part of the fallen world that there is decay, disease, and death. At some point, you will suffer. Wait, and God will show you His mercy in it.

If nothing else, if God permits your death in a way we dislike or think premature, His mercy is shown in the fact you are absent from your decaying body and present with Jesus.

There are usually other, more subtle, mercies to discover. But you must be like the servant passionately attending to his or her master's hand.

**I** want to add an important element to this idea of beholding the Lord's hand.

When the risen Lord appeared suddenly to the disciples, He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands" (John 20:27).

Look to THAT hand. Wait until the nail print comes into focus. Concentrate on what the Lord has done.

The hand we are beholding for guidance is nail-printed. He knows you intimately, and He loves you with everlasting love. He promised to keep you until the end. He can't help Himself from showing you mercy - regardless your circumstances.

## **#2 - Behold The Lord's Hand Until You Show His Mercy Through You (v3-4)**

"Contempt" is the word repeated twice in two verses:

- 👤 In verse three, the psalmist has contempt for himself, and indicates that all believers ought to hold themselves in contempt.

7 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



👤 In verse four he points out that nonbelievers hold believers in contempt.

Psa 123:3 Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.

What does he mean by “contempt?” Definitions are useful, but they can’t always communicate the psalmist’s intent the way an illustration can.

Earlier we were in Heaven with Isaiah. Between his vision of the LORD and the coal touching his lips, he said, “Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts” (6:5).

That is the kind of “contempt” a believer is to have for himself, or for herself. Albert Barnes writes:

This expression evidently denotes that he was a “sinner,” and especially that he was unworthy either to join in the praise of a God so holy, or to deliver a message in His name. The vision; the profound worship of the seraphim; and the attendant majesty and glory, had deeply impressed him with a sense of the holiness of God, and of his own unfitness either to join in worship so holy, or to deliver the message of so pure a God.

Holding yourself in contempt is more than an awareness that, although justified and declared righteous, you remain a sinner. It is deeply experiencing the truth of your being a sinner, but seeing through it to God’s mercy in saving you.

C.S. Lewis said, “A Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble - because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time.”

8 of 11

Psalm 123

*“I Wanna Behold Your Hand”*





In His mercy is the incredible encouragement to serve Him. Stop and take that in. God partners with you.

The psalmist next discusses how nonbelievers hold believers in contempt.

Psa 123:4 Our soul is exceedingly filled With the scorn of those who are at ease, With the contempt of the proud.

“Proud” and at “ease” were the psalmists words describing nonbelievers. There are, of course, many other words that could be used of them.

Here is something to remember when you are being held in contempt: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you.** But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (First Corinthians 6:9-11).

Nonbelievers hold you in contempt; or they should. They think you are weak and foolish for believing in Jesus. Your habits and lifestyle might cause them to scorn. Certainly your values are vastly different from those of nonbelievers... *Aren't they?*

The apostle Paul categorizes believers as “foolish,” “base,” and “despised.”

1Co 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.*

9 of 11

Psalm 123

*“I Wanna Behold Your Hand”*



1Co 1:27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

1Co 1:28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

1Co 1:29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Is that how nonbelievers see you? If not, consider this: It IS possible for a believer to NOT want to be considered these ways; to not be held in any contempt.

**We can avoid it by living like, by looking like, the world.**

Psalm 123 seems like an odd choice for a Psalm of Ascents. It's really perfect for the playlist.

The pilgrim has come to the presence of God, in His holy Temple. He didn't travel there to be entertained. He traveled there to get a vision of God. Any such vision is going to reveal you as a sinner who is to be rededicated to serve the hand of your Lord.

"Gimme your hands," demanded Quint. If we could, in the sound studio, take away the gruffness and condescension of Quint, it would be a great quote to attribute to Jesus.

Think of Jesus, with His everlasting love for you, asking you each day, "Gimme your hands," so that our hands could, in a sense, be His hands.

10 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*



**B**elievers will stand, individually, before the Reward Seat of Jesus. It isn't an examination of works to see if you've done enough to be saved. No, you are saved by grace, through faith - not of works. The Reward Seat is an examination of your works so that the Lord can celebrate His work in and through you. These rewards will adorn you, the way a bride is adorned for the Bridegroom in a wedding.

If the Lord, at His Reward Seat, were to say to you, "Gimme your hands," what would He see?

You don't want Him to see city boy hands that have been counting money all your life.

Your hands should be scarred, calloused, cut, and bruised for having responded to the subtle servant signals of Jesus.

11 of 11

Psalm 123

*"I Wanna Behold Your Hand"*

