

Where Shall I Look?

Text: Psalm 123:1

Suggested Hymns:

552, 559, 368, 282, 554

- 1) Psalm 123
- 2) Shall I look back?
- 3) Shall I look forward
- 4) Shall I look around me?
- 5) Shall I look inward?
- 6) I will look up

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 123:1, *'Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On midnight, the 31st of December 2015, bells rang and whistles blew to mark the end of 2015 — and the beginning of 2016. The hour which ties two years together found more people engaged in revelry and parties than any other single hour of the year. Why is that so?

It is very evident that the world would like to forget something. It arranges loud parties in the hope of drowning out the quiet whisper of an approaching eternity. As the saying goes, *"Time flies on silent wings."* That silence becomes oppressive for those who fear eternity.

But time waits for no man. We see it in the faces of friends whom we have not met for some time; they are older. We see it in every falling leaf and every drooping flower. We are reminded of it every time someone hands us a new calendar.

Whenever the Bible refers to the passing of time, it speaks in solemn words. God wants us to think serious thoughts whenever the truth forces itself upon our attention that *"We finish our years like a sigh"* as it is written in Psalm 90:9.

And what kind of thoughts does God want us to think? This is a good subject for our New Year's Day sermon so let us consider the question, *Where Shall I Look, at the Turning of the Year?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Psalm 123

Let us first take a closer look at Psalm 123. It is called *The Eyes of a Servant*. In Psalm 123 the psalmist's eyes rise from Jerusalem to the Lord, who is enthroned in heaven. Notice the rising pattern in the words "eyes" and "mercy."

It reads: *Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.* 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. ³ *Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.* ⁴ *Our soul is exceedingly filled With the scorn of those who are at ease, With the contempt of the proud.*

The Old Testament believers recognised that the hills were not their security and that Jerusalem itself was not their greatest joy. They looked to the Lord as their source of joy and as their fortress. As slaves depend on their masters for everything, so believers depend on the Lord for everything.

This psalm turns our attention to the scorn the pilgrim receives from those who surround him. The Jews' religious practices, which set them apart from the gentile world, did not win them much favour in the ancient world.

On the contrary, pagans heaped ridicule upon them. Today things are no different for Christians, who take God at His word. They will receive scorn from every direction — from scoffers outside the church and from negative critics within, from scientists and sensualists, from lovers of wisdom and lovers of pleasure.

In Scripture the contrast between the humble and the proud is synonymous with the contrast between believers and unbelievers. The humble place God's wisdom ahead of the world's. They place God's honour ahead of their own. They look to God for vindication and wait patiently for His mercy, remembering that Christ bore the contempt of the world for us and that it is an honour to suffer for His name.

2. Where Shall I Look At The Turning Of The Year?

Shall I Look Back?

On New Year's Eve you and I wrote the last words of another chapter in our life's record. At midnight we placed the last "full-stop" after the last sentence.

When I take this last chapter and read it with Jesus looking over my shoulder, there are sentences I am ashamed of. I have made many mistakes in 2015. Many a good and noble deed that I might have done .to the glory of God and to the welfare of my neighbour. still remains undone.

This last chapter records these sins of omission. Ugly blots are scattered all over the page. Someday the very last chapter in the book will still read the same. An old man, lying on his deathbed, summed up the situation correctly when he told his pastor, "*I am about to stand trial for 85 years of sinning.*" *What shall I do? Where shall I look today?*

We cannot look back. We can only ask God to cover the past with His mercy and forgiveness in Christ. We come at the dawn of this year to receive the assurance of pardon for all that has been wrong in 2015.

The hymnist writes:¹

*I don't look back; God knows the fruitless efforts,
The wasted hours, the sinning, the regrets;
I leave them all with Him who blots the record,
And mercifully forgives, and then forgets.*

3. Where Shall I Look At The Turning Of The Year? Shall I Look Forward?

Where shall I look this morning? What about the future? Is there anything encouraging in that? Will it be a good year for me? A year of well-being and prosperity? A year of health and contentment?

Or will it bring stark tragedy to my footsteps? Will weariness and pain draw out the days in endless misery? Will 2016 leave an aching void in my heart because some loved one has been taken out of my happy family circle?

If I could only see the road that lies before me! No, don't try to push aside the veil behind which a merciful God hides the future from our inquisitive eyes. Rather say with the hymnist:

I don't look forward; God sees all the future,

*The road that, long or short, will lead me home,
And He will face with me its every trial
And bear for me the burdens that may come.*

4. Where Shall I Look At The Turning Of The Year? Shall I Look Around Me?

Where shall I look this morning? Shall I look at what I see around me? A civilisation which has produced an economic and scientific Frankenstein, who threatens to destroy those who have created it? A world gone mad through lust of power and wealth and pleasure? A world that has forgotten God and lives unto itself?

A world in which might is right, and human rights and the dignity of man are trodden under foot? A world which is dividing itself into two camps and getting ready for another world wide conflict? A world in which we rear our children with trepidation and anxiety because the away-from-God trend is so overpowering?

Again the hymnist writes

*I don't look round me; then would fears assail me,
So wild the tumult of earth's restless seas;
So dark the world, so filled with woe and evil;
So vain the hope of comfort or of ease.*

5. Where Shall I Look At The Turning Of The Year? Shall I Look Inward?

Where shall I look today? Shall I grow moody and look into the depths of my inmost mind? Shall I seek confidence in self-reliance, in a sort of inner light that leads me? Shall I find certainty and assurance and courage and hope in the inner recesses of my soul?

The hymnist continues:

*I don't look in, for then I am most wretched;
Myself has naught on which to stay my trust.
Nothing I see save failures and shortcomings
And weak endeavours crumbling in the dust.*

6. Where Shall I Look At The Turning Of The Year?

I Will Look Up

Where shall I look? The hymnist writes:

*I shall look up — into the face of Jesus,
For there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled;
And there is joy, and love, and light for darkness,
And perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled.*

Yes, our text says¹ *Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.*

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 121, ¹ *I will lift up my eyes to the hills -- From whence comes my help?* ² *My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.* ³ *He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.* ⁴ *Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

⁵ *The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand.* ⁶ *The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.* ⁷ *The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.* ⁸ *The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore.*

Yes, the Lord is rich in mercy, He will pardon your iniquity, your transgression, and your sin. Let Him cover the past with the forgiveness we have in Christ.

Scripture says in Romans 8:31-39, ³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

³³ *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

³⁶ *As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”* ³⁷ *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

³⁸ *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Where shall I look in the New Year? I will look up — I will look up into the face of Jesus.

Our text says, *Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens.* 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.*

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,²

*My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour divine.
Now hear me while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day
Be wholly Thine. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ *I see Jesus*, Annie Johnson Flint, “Melodies of Praise”

² Hymn 368