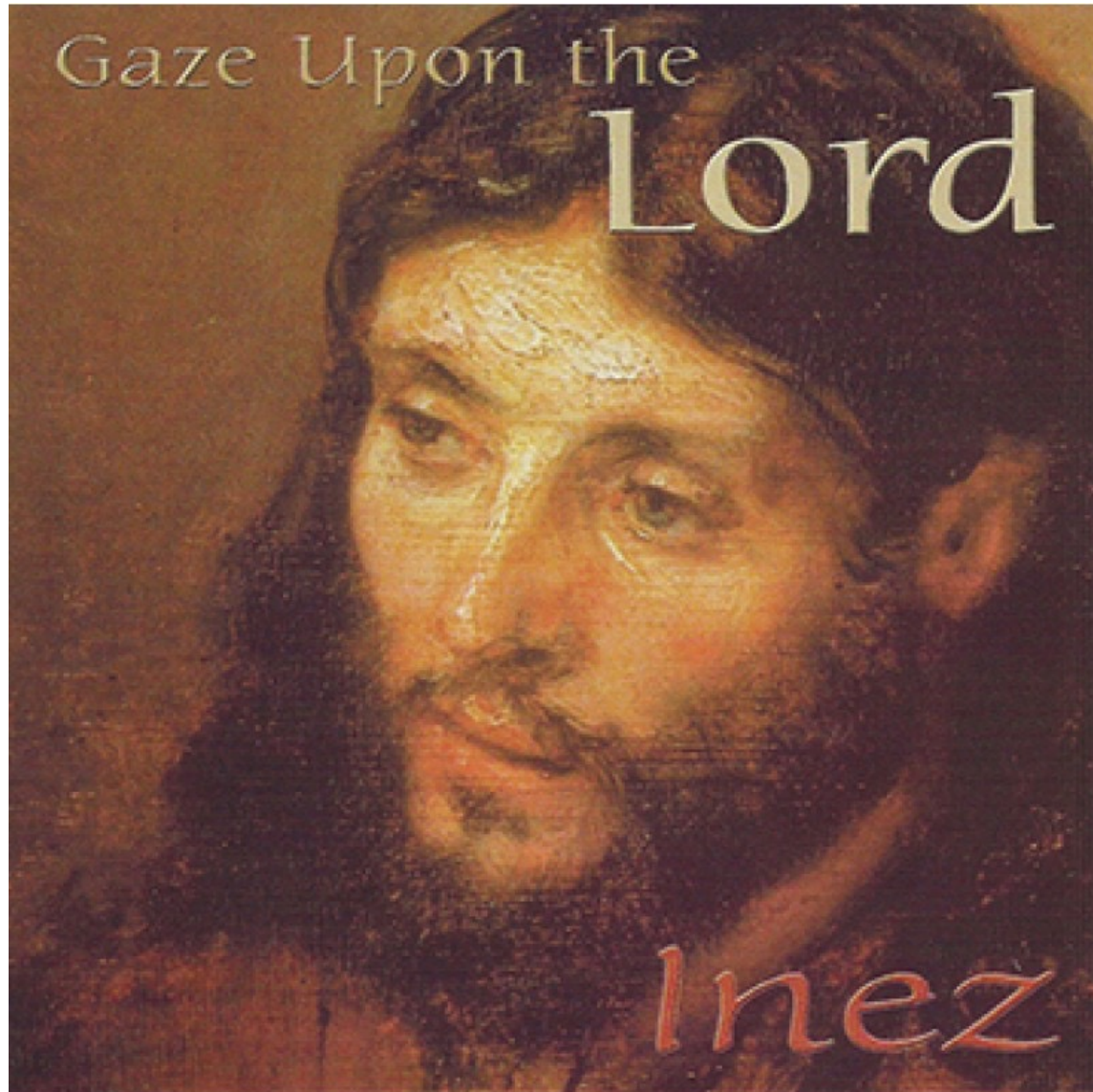


Psalm 123: Gaze upon the Lord



Psalm 123 (122) (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4.....32)

The psalmist is being humiliated.

- Is he in exile (compare Psalm 137)?
- Is he living under the Samaritan governor at the time of the reconstruction of Judah by Nehemiah (see Nehemiah 2:17-20; 4:1-5)?
- Does he belong to a social class in Judah that is being humiliated by others of their own people (see Nehemiah 5)?

I lift up my eyes to you,
to you who are enthroned in the heavens.

The psalmist looks to God knowing that his real value is in relationship to God, and that God will never humiliate

‘Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forever more’(Psalm 131).

God's heart goes out to the humiliated.

‘Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children’(Psalm 113:5-9).

‘My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.’

(Psalm 25:15-18)

‘My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God’(Psalm 69:3).

‘My eyes fail with watching for your promise.

I ask: When will you comfort me?’(Psalm 119:82).

‘My eyes are turned toward you, Lord, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; do not leave me defenceless’(Psalm 141:8).

A servant watches his master's hand,
a servant girl, the hand of her mistress.
So our eyes look to our God,
waiting for a sign of our Lord's tender compassion.

‘I called on the name of the Lord: ‘Lord, I pray,
save my life!’ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is tenderly compassionate. The Lord
protects the simple; when I was brought low, he
saved me’(Psalm 116:4-6).

Have mercy upon us, Lord,
have mercy upon us.

kyrie eleison [κυριε ελεησον].

We have had more than we can take
of the scorn and contempt of the proud.

We think of Jesus' words: 'The Son of Man is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt'(Mark 9:12).

We contemplate Jesus being mocked by the soldiers (Mark 15:18-19), by those who were passing by (Mark 15:30), by the leaders (Mark 15:31-32) and by those who were being crucified with him (Mark 15:32).

‘The people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine’(Luke 23:35-36).

We recall also Jesus' words, picked up later by Peter:

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely because of me'(Matthew 5:11).

'If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you'(1Peter 4:14).

The psalmist encourages us to reflect on the folly of being self-satisfied and looking down on others

* the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector, Luke 18:9-14).

‘By the grace of God I am what I am’(1Corinthians 15:10).

‘Whoever belittles another lacks sense,
but an intelligent person remains silent’(Proverbs 11:12).

‘Those who despise their neighbours are sinners,
but happy are those who are kind to the poor.’

(Proverbs 14:21)

‘Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.’

(Proverbs 17:5)

‘Do not cheat the poor of their living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not grieve the hungry or anger one in need. Do not add to the troubles of the desperate or delay giving to the needy. Do not reject a suppliant in distress, or turn your face away from the poor. Do not avert your eye from the needy, and give no one reason to curse you; for if in bitterness of soul some should curse you, the Creator will hear their prayer’(Sirach 4:1-6).

‘The wisdom of the humble lifts their heads high, and seats them among the great. Do not praise individuals for their good looks, or loathe anyone because of appearance alone ... Do not boast about wearing fine clothes, and do not exalt yourself when you are honoured’(Sirach 11:1-4).