

The Wealth That Can Ransom a Soul

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[0 : 0 0] that don't know me, my name is Chris Bradley. I'm not the pastor. Pastor Capone is on vacation this week, so I'm filling in for him, but happy to be here continuing our series in the Psalms as we study this week's Psalm 49. We'll be in the Psalms all summer. Psalm 49 is the text for today, so we'll start with the Psalm and we'll go to the New Testament, which is one of the principles of understanding the Old Testament, and it points us to Christ. So that's where we'll be reflecting on both in Psalm 49 and if you want to follow along in your worship guide, Psalm 49, and have your Bible open if you have it to Luke 12. So a convenient place to start would be Luke 12 in your Bibles and have Psalm 49 in your worship guide and follow along with me as I read the text. Psalm 49, I'll be reading from the English Standard Version. Hear this, all peoples, give ear all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom. The meditation of my heart shall be understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb. I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre. Verse 5, why should I fear in times of trouble when the iniquity of those who cheat surrounds me, who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? Truly no man can give to God the price of his life. For the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit. For he sees that even the wise die. The fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they called lands by their own names. Verse 12, man in his pomp will not remain. He is like the beasts that perish. This is the path of those who have foolish confidence. Yet after them people approve of their boasts. Like sheep, they are appointed for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning.

Their form shall be consumed in Sheol with no place to dwell. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies, he will carry nothing away. His glory will not go down after him.

For though while he lives, he counts himself blessed, and though you get praise when you do well for yourself, his soul will go to the generation of his fathers who will never again see the light. Man in his pomp, yet without understanding, is like the beasts that perish. May the Lord add his blessing to the reading and the careful hearing of his word. Amen.

All right, we've talked about, or Pastor Capone talked about Psalm 2 last week, a psalm expressed in poetry, which many of the psalms are. This psalm also is expressed in poetry, but this psalm we would classify in the category of a psalm of wisdom, and you can see that from the first four verses.

[3 : 1 4] Look at the beginning of the passage here. Verses 1 through 4 tell us that this is the author, the psalmist, giving us wisdom, expressing it in poetry, but there's a specific category of psalm where the psalmist is not principally giving us a prayer or even a song, but wisdom. Wisdom in the sense that the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes and Job and Proverbs gives us wisdom to understand the world, to interpret it rightly according to the word of God. So there are many definitions of wisdom, but the Bible's definition gives us three primary characteristics, three characteristics of wisdom that are in the passage here, in the assumptions behind what is wisdom. One is that wisdom is based on knowing and fearing God. Job 28, 28 says, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding. Wisdom is based in knowing and fearing God. Wisdom is knowing the Lord.

The second characteristic, wisdom is given by God. James 1, 5 tells us to ask for wisdom. He says, If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. Wisdom, like all gifts, comes from the Father of lights, the Father who gives gifts to his people. Wisdom is one of those gifts. So if we are to seek wisdom, we must seek it from God, because wisdom is given by God. And the third characteristic of biblical wisdom is that God,

wisdom alone, can reveal how God speaks to us through his creation. And that's the most important characteristic for this passage today. It tells us how God speaks to us through his creation.

This is from Ecclesiastes 2, 6. The writer says, For the one who pleases him, God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy. But to the sinner, he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to the one who pleases God. In other words, those without wisdom, those without the Lord, they live their lives gathering and collecting, never understanding the purpose, the meaning behind it all, which is what the writer of Ecclesiastes wrestles with through his whole book. They don't understand. They don't understand the vanity of what they're subject to. The wise receive it. The wise who know God receive it, because God explains it to him. The creation speaks of the glory of God. The creation tells us about God's attributes, and we need wisdom to understand it. And that wisdom is given by God. Wisdom is what God supplies for us to interpret the entire world as a revelation from him.

Now, have you thought about that? That the entire world is a revelation from God, but it reveals nothing until we have wisdom that we can interpret it. That wisdom comes from the word of God. That wisdom comes, in this instance, from Psalm 49, who teaches us, the writer teaches us about wisdom to interpret the events around us. And only with those, those who have the Holy Spirit can hear what God has to say through creation. Wisdom is, or creation is revelation to everyone, but only those with the Holy Spirit can interpret it. Only those who are followers of the Lord can understand wisdom and understand the world.

The one who does not hear God's voice in creation is called, in the Psalms and in the Proverbs, a fool. He's called a fool because he does not have wisdom. They do not have the Spirit of God that interprets the world wisely, according to God's word. In verse 10, they are the fools. They are the stupid.

[6 : 31] The fool says in his heart, Psalm 14, that there is no God. It's foolishness that cannot understand the world as God speaking, as a creator expressing himself to his creatures. Put briefly, the only way we can know wisdom is to hear it from the Lord. The only way we can know wisdom is to hear it from the Lord. Look at verses 3 and 4.

The writer's mouth shall speak wisdom. But how? How does the writer's mouth speak wisdom? It answers itself in verse 4. By inclining his ear to a proverb. And here we have something rather amazing. What is the writer doing?

He's writing down what he has heard. He's inclining his ear. He's inclining it to listen. As a musician, inclines his ear to the lyre, verse 4, so that his words might be in tune with what the lyre plays. He's hearing what he's expressing. Where is he hearing it from? He's hearing it from God. This is what we call inspiration. The writer's not speaking his own mind. He's speaking what he has received from God.

And this inspiration is the only way that we can have confidence in the Bible. By knowing that God put his words in it. That it's not just the words of men. The words of Psalm 49 are not the words of men. They're the words that God has expressed to men that we might understand his word, as he's done throughout the entire Bible.

[7 : 53] So in a psalm of wisdom, what we can expect to see is the psalmist explain the facts of our existence. The just and the unjust facts. The things that give us comfort and the things that challenge and frustrate us.

He'll lay out those facts. He'll lay out a problem that we see as arising from those facts. And we can expect him to interpret those difficulties in the light of what he's heard from God.

And what God has revealed to him. And that's what we see here. God in Psalm 49 gives his people exclusive knowledge of what is a mystery to the rest of mankind.

What is the problem? We see it in verses, starting in verse 5. I'm going to read verses 5 to 10 again. So follow along. Starting in verse 5 of Psalm 49. So what's the problem that we see introduced?

Two problems. The problem of inequity, as well as the problem of death. The problem of inequity and the problem of death. There are the rich who trust in their wealth, and they gain an advantage over the rest.

[9 : 20] And then at their deaths, there is no comfort knowing that we die the same death they do. The just and the unjust alike perish. So the problem first is inequity and injustice.

It's the question, why do the unjust rich cheat and gain advantage over the rest of humanity? Or put differently, in life, we seem to be unequal, the just and the unjust.

But we should be equal. In life, we seem to be unequal, but we should be equal. That's the first problem. And the second problem is the problem of death. Which asks the question, why must we all, rich and poor, wise and foolish, alike die?

In other words, in death, we're all equal, just and unjust. But it shouldn't be that way. So the first problem, in life, we're unequal, and it shouldn't be that way.

And the second problem, in death, we're all equal, and it shouldn't be that way. So let's look at the first problem first, the problem of inequity. The unjust rich seem to always gain the advantage.

[10:21] And we know this to be true. In fact, given the impunity with which men are able to trust in wealth, you might be tempted to think that it's normal, that it's even virtuous to be a rich man who, for instance, leaves his wealth behind him to make a name for himself.

We even have a name for that in our culture. We call it philanthropy. And it's a noble thing for a rich man to leave his wealth behind, the abundance of his wealth, and when he dies, he leaves it behind for others.

But here's the stumbling block that the psalmist speaks about. There's something about that kind of prosperity, the prosperity of the wicked in particular, that causes us to fear. It's not primarily that we envy them, and when they gain wealth and prosperity, although we do do that, we envy them.

But we look around the world and we see the world's reward system, and we wonder, sometimes against our better instincts, we wonder if we've missed out on something. Those who are following the Lord, have we missed out on something because we're not seeing the rewards that the world gives?

Maybe you haven't seen any reward yet, and you ask, are you doing the right thing? Shouldn't you be seeing more prosperity because you're following the Lord? Maybe the fact that you're not as rich as your neighbor is God's judgment against you.

[11:39] Dig deep and see if you don't have that thought sometimes yourself. Because no matter what your bank balances are, you don't have to look far around you to find someone who has more, someone who you can envy, because they have more than you.

So the prosperity of the fool and the wicked can make you think that you're striving after the wrong things, that you're following the Lord and you're not seeing the world reward you for it. But keep in mind that what's frustrating you about this is God's patience and his kindness.

All people receive life and gifts and pleasure from God, and they receive them on the basis of grace. And all grace is good, and all grace is beautiful regardless of who receives it.

Matthew 5.45 says, He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Remember, though, that we are people who have received immeasurably more than what we call this common grace, the grace that the unjust and the just receive alike.

We have much more than that, than common grace. So don't fear. Verse 16. Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. What you see, the grace that God gives the just and the unjust alike, is not true riches.

[12:59] It's not the treasure that God has waiting for the people who follow him. It's grace. We shouldn't envy or begrudge grace. But we ought to look forward to the immeasurable riches that we have in Christ, rather than what we see.

So don't fear them, the psalmist says in verses 8 and 9. Don't fear the unjust rich, but fear for them, because the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice that he should live on forever and never see the pit.

A ransom, in biblical terms, is just the cost to a purchase. It's not like a kidnapping, typically. We think of a ransom in terms of a kidnapping, but it's not. That's not the sense of the word here. A ransom is the price for something.

A ransom is the price to cost or to purchase or to redeem something. If you have a mortgage, you have a ransom to pay for your house. That's the simple meaning of a ransom. What we have in verse 8, oh, and the pit, right?

The pit is an expression of death. The Psalms use the pit a lot, especially when death comes upon you unawares. The grave is talked about as Sheol in the Psalms. The pit has a specific connotation that death comes up and catches you.

[14:08] It's a trap. The pit is a death trap, as an animal falls into a pit as he's captured by the hunter. So what we have in verse 8 is that whatever the rich man accumulates, there will not be enough there to pay what's required to live forever.

The ransom of his life is costly, and that's an understatement. The ransom of his life is much more than any riches that he could accumulate. This is the wisdom that God gives to those who will hear it, but wisdom that the foolish and the unjust will not receive.

A foolish rich man that we still remember, we remember for now, is Hugh Hefner, of Playboy magazine fame. You know the name. Did Hugh Hefner's life of pleasure and ease contribute anything to the ransom for his life?

In all his wealth, did he earn enough for the price of his life? No. In fact, he's rightly the object of our pity, not our envy. He died, and now all he owns is a small plot of land about six feet deep.

The wisdom that we have before us says there are some things that money can't buy. Verse 7, no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life.

[15:24] Now, does Hugh Hefner have a legacy? Does he have an estate? Well, yes. He has a legacy. I would say he doesn't have an estate. We talk about the term estate. Estate comes from a Latin word, meaning the place you stand in.

The place you stand in is your estate. Now, what Hugh Hefner has after he dies is not an estate in his mansion because he doesn't have it. It's given to others.

Is he still remembered? Does he still have a legacy? Yes. Like many of the foolish rich, their estates live on, but they live on in the hands of others after their deaths. And this is what the Spirit says about legacies.

They called lands by their own names, verse 11. They made a name for themselves in the lands that they left behind, in the estates they left behind. But in the end, whether a legacy is a noble one or not, they leave their wealth.

They leave their estate to others, verse 10. The truth is, the glory, or the legacy, we could say, they leave behind will not bring them credit before God. They're still left with no place to dwell, no estate remaining.

[16:28] You've probably heard the story of the two grave diggers who are charged with burying a rich man. The first grave digger says to the other, this was a wealthy man. How much, how much do you think he left behind?

And what does the other one say? All of it. He left all of it behind. That's another way of saying you can't take it with you. For all of us, rich or poor, the only earthly thing left to us in death is a six-foot deep plot of land that serves as our grave.

And this is true of the rich and poor alike. Verse 11. Their graves are their homes forever. The rich fool thinks by leaving a legacy, he somehow becomes less dead at the end.

But we can see how foolish it is to be the one who trusts in wealth, knowing that at their death, their estate will still be there, their wealth will still be there, it just won't be there for them.

So you can have a legacy, you can be remembered, it just won't make you any less dead. You can leave an estate, but it won't be yours. We laugh rightly because it's foolish.

[17:35] And we will, even the rich men will not admit that I'm trying to beat death by leaving my estate. But we know in the heart, in the heart of the unjust rich, that's where their confidence is, the confidence in wealth, that I'll somehow become less dead, that I will live on.

We even use those words, I will live on in my estate. I will live on in my foundation, the foundation that I give through my wealth. So not only is the rich man foolish to think that his estate will make him less dead, but he's foolish to think that it can make him secure in this life.

There is a rich fool in Jesus' parable. This is in Luke 12. Who planned out his estate for security. For years to come, not knowing that his soul still belonged to God.

With all his wealth, his soul still belonged to God. And God was calling in the loan. This is Luke 12, starting in verse 16. Jesus told them a parable, saying, the land of a rich man produced plentifully.

And he thought to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and all my goods.

[18:43] And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, fool, this night your life is required of you.

And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure in heaven, treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. You see, Jesus shows us how poorly this fool has thought through his life and how poorly he's thought through his death in particular.

You see, he had wealth, but his soul still belonged to God. And God was calling in the loan. His estate was not enough to pay off that mortgage, great as it was.

The ransom of his life was too costly even for him. So what's the problem again? The first problem, the problem of inequity. The unjust, hoarders of wealth seem to gain advantage over the rest of humanity.

And the problem of death, the poor and the innocent join the unjust, rich, in the same death. So the psalm begins to answer the first problem by showing us another side of the problem, the problem for the fool who is the rich man who trusts in wealth.

[19 : 53] And that alleviates some of the problem. There's no longer a reason to envy the unjust rich, but now there's reason to pity. To pity those who trust in riches because we know they have a foolish confidence.

God's wisdom says it's foolish to confide in wealth. As your security. But so far the inequity isn't removed, but it's minimized. It shows us there's false sense of confidence.

Their riches only serve to numb them as death brings them unwittingly nearer. Just like a shepherd brings his sheep peacefully to be slaughtered.

Verses 13 and 14. In the words of the psalm, whatever you trust in will lead you to your shepherd. If you trust in wealth, then death is your shepherd.

Verses 13 to 14. This is the path of those who have foolish confidence, yet after them people approve of their boasts. Like sheep, they're appointed for Sheol, or the grave. Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning.

[20 : 55] Their form shall be consumed in the grave with no place to dwell. This is the path of the foolish. Like sheep, they're appointed for the grave. Death shall be their shepherd. When the Bible uses the imagery of a shepherd, it brings the idea of simple, unquestioning sheep following their leader wherever he wills them to go.

This is how sheep are. They happily and unflinchingly go where their shepherd leads them. And the shepherd is leading them not to a green pasture where they can feed on rich grass, but to a pit where death will feed on them.

Verse 14. Now it's been said that the Old Testament believers didn't have a view of the afterlife.

Christian commentators say this often. The Old Testament believers didn't have a view of the afterlife. They had a view of the promised land that was an earthly inheritance, the land of Canaan, that there just was Sheol, the end, the grave at the end of life.

But the words of the psalm tell us differently. It's that there is a death reserved for the wicked that's eternal, one that consumes forever. As Isaiah told, he says it's a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

This death is being consumed forever. There's a biblical picture of the fool for you, a rich man following his shepherd to his miserable death, but happily and unquestioningly, and happily in part because he's surrounded by his own fans on the journey.

[22 : 17] This is verse 13. Yet after them, people approve of their boasts. His self-satisfied happiness turns out to be the most foolish thing of all. It's happiness that makes this mistake.

The mistake is to think that God must have the same opinion of them as the people around them, as their admirers around them. That's the fool's mistake, to think that God must think the same thing of me as my admirers, as my flatterers think of me.

They say, if everyone thinks I'm wonderful, surely God must think I'm okay. The ease of wealth and the adulation of men has the effect of numbing you to your own guilt before God and the enormous cost of the ransom you owe.

So the lesson of the rich fool in Luke 12 is this, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. And what makes one rich toward God?

What makes you rich toward God is having your mortgage paid off, having the ransom for the redemption of your life paid for. That's treasure in heaven. That's riches toward God.

[23 : 25] And those are the riches that you trust in, that followers of Christ trust in beyond earthly riches. Now there is at least a substantial portion of an answer to the question about inequity and death.

The inequity of the unjust rich lording it over the rest is really an illusion. There is the answer. It isn't really that they're better off, that there is injustice, because that reality is an illusion.

It's foolishness to believe that the condition can last for long, the condition of the unjust prospering, for death will bring the foolish down and will consume them. But it's also far from providing comfort to those of us who understand wealth to be fleeting, who don't trust in riches.

It's probably no comfort to you that the unjust and the just will all die alike. So the second problem still remains. The second problem is the problem of death. The comfort comes and not the answer to the question for why must we all suffer death alike, but in pointing us beyond wealth and beyond our deaths.

That's where verse 15 goes. If you continue with me to verse 15, but God will ransom my soul from the power of the grave, for he will receive me.

[24 : 35] A but God in the Bible always brings good news. And here's a but God that we need to pay attention to because it brings the reversal. It brings the wisdom that explains the paradox, the frustrating reality of life in an unjust world.

A but God like the but God in Acts 13. When Paul and Barnabas were speaking in the church, the burgeoning church in Antioch, and they're sharing the gospel with the people, they said of Jesus that they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

But God raised him from the dead. The but God brought good news. And in Romans 5, when Paul says, there's not many places you will find a just person dying for another person.

He says in Romans 5, one will scarcely die for a righteous person, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The but God here is that he will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, from the power of the grave, for he will receive me.

Remember that wisdom is knowing that God, that everything in creation is God revealing something to us. If we have wisdom, we will see God speaking wherever we find death.

[25 : 47] When we see the death of the unjust rich, we see their worldly gain erased. When we see the death of God's people, we look at them and we see the hope that they finally gained.

They live their lives in an unseen hope that they now see. And it reminds us that we share in the same hope. We need that reminder because we are living by what we see and what we see is injustice.

We need to be reminded by the saints who have gone before us that the hope that they did not see is a hope they now see and a hope that's waiting for us. I'm reminded of the saints who have died in the last five years in our church family.

Since we've been here, I'm surrounded by their witness already to their hope in death because they were rich toward God. God. This isn't all that we've seen die, saints who've died in the church, but in the last five years, David Erickson, Jane Hudson, Stephen Clark, and just in the last several weeks, Doug McClure and Walt Pinson.

That's a lot of death in a congregation our size in a rather short time. But if we're wise, we'll see God speaking to us through all of the deaths of these, our brothers and sisters.

[27 : 03] If we're wise, we'll see God's word explaining their deaths to us because what we don't see is what they see. They see their hope realized.

They don't walk by faith anymore. They walk by sight. Look at verse 15 again. But God will ransom my soul from the power of the grave for he will receive me as he has received my brothers and sisters.

In this but God, wisdom swoops in and makes a perplexing and a despairing reality a reason for comfort. It says that there are, though there are no worldly riches that will make you less dead at the end of your life, your soul has its ransom paid.

Death won't hold power over you and you won't be consumed by it. The words are, he will receive you. And you can say this about yourself. He will receive me.

Mark 10, 45, the son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many. The faithful dead, the saints, have been received by God because the ransom for their lives was paid.

[28 : 12] When the psalmist got old and he saw his brothers and sisters die, he was able to say to his comfort, yes, I'll share in their same death, but I share in the same hope as well, that he will receive me.

So again, don't listen to anyone who tells you that the Old Testament saints didn't believe in eternal life after death because it's there. It's also there in verses 14 and 15.

In death, look at verse 14, there is a morning, the upright shall rule over them in the morning. There is a morning after death in which the foolish being shepherded by death will be brought into

judgment and ruled by the upright, the saints.

The saints of God will rule men and angels in the kingdom to come and this is a morning in which God's people will be received into their eternal dwelling. Verse 15, he will receive me.

And the morning after death is the first time we will see with our own eyes what real riches are. The first time we will see it. The treasure that we did not see, the treasure that earthly riches distracted us from, we'll finally see them with our own eyes.

[29 : 19] So believer in Christ, your shepherd is also leading you and he's a better shepherd than death because he's leading you not to your deaths, he's leading you through death and into glory as he did with the saints that went before us.

It's like there are two shepherds leading two flocks. They're both walking in the same direction and both apparently to the same place and you, when you're young, you're on the first part of this journey with your shepherd and you don't see the end, you just see two flocks going to approximately the same place but as you get older, you start to see the end.

You start to see the end of where the shepherd is leading his people and you look over to that other flock and you see happy sheep, fatter sheep, sheep that seem to be doing very, very well but then as you approach the end of where the shepherd is bringing the sheep, you start to see the pit and you see that shepherd is leading his people to a pit and you start to see where the paths diverge.

This is what age does and this is why kids, you're not thinking about death very much because you are a sheep at the very beginning of your journey. You don't see what's up ahead. You start to think about that as you get older as your shepherd is leading the flock towards their final destination and you look over to those happy, unfailingly, unquestioningly sheep and you see they're being led to the pit.

Death is their shepherd and your death waits for you too. You're heading to the same place. You're heading to death but unlike the flock of fools, that's not where you will remain because your shepherd is not leading you to death, he's leading you through death.

[31 : 04] What does Psalm 23 say? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

He, what? He restores my soul. At death, your soul is collected but in Christ, he restores it to you.

Everyone sees death but believers in Christ, your shepherd restores your soul to you. At the end of the Psalm, when the psalmist restates the problem that he introduces at the beginning, he says, man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beast that perish, verse 20.

The solution is written there right in the statement of the problem, yet without understanding or yet without wisdom. Yes, all alike die, the rich and the poor die, and in your lives you'll have front row seats to the abuse of wealth and the prosperity of the wicked.

But God's word is interpreting that for us and it's revealing a truth, a life-giving truth that what you trust in leads you to your shepherd. If you trust in the Lord, Jesus Christ is your shepherd.

[32 : 16] He's not leading you to death. He's leading you through death. Psalm 73, which we read earlier today, says, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel and afterward you receive me into glory. There is a hope of glory after death. The Old Testament saints knew it. We know it because we have a shepherd. We have a shepherd.

We know that it will bring us out of the pit, out of death, because our soul belongs to him and his desire is to return it back to us. If you continue reading Psalm 73, you find these words, whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. Those are wise words, words of one who is rich toward God, whose ransom, their mortgage for their life has been paid, who sees nothing of worth when it's set beside the shepherd who sits in heaven, leading us, leading us through death. Let's pray. Father, make us to be a people who walk in this wisdom, who are rich in God and have the understanding to know how fleeting are our small and our worldly riches.

[33 : 29] Whatever our estate is, their small and worldly riches. Give us the sense not to envy the wealth of those around us, but to seek your kingdom first and always and do this by the power of your Holy Spirit and in the name of Christ our Savior.

Amen.