

Psalm 49

This Psalm is a “wisdom Psalm” offering instructions to human beings rather than praise and worship to the Creator God.

Psalms 49:1-4 [New King James] *“Hear this, all peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will disclose my dark saying on the harp.”*

The message that this Psalm brings is universal among humanity.

Psalms 49:5-6 [New King James] *“Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me? Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches,”*

This is relating the thoughts of the wicked and wealthy in society.

The word “why” is an invitation to take a fresh look at our life, which is always a fruitful approach even when we are surrounded with evil and problems. Even before the answer to the question why? The question itself has offered a clue with the words *“those who trust in their wealth,”* since wealth is notoriously unstable, [**Proverbs 23:5**].

The full absurdity of such a false trust in riches is exposed.

Psalms 49:7-9 [New King James] *“None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever, that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit.”*

The “ransom” picture is doubly appropriate, since being held ransom is as much a hazard of the very rich as redemption is the need of the very poor.

At this stage in the Psalm the point is our inability to buy our way, or that of anyone else, out of dying.

The question of “ransom” as atonement, [**Matthew 20:28**] is **not** even considered and **not** even glimpsed at until **verse 15**, then only indirectly.

Psalms 49:10-12 [New King James] *“For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.”*

With merciless clarity the answer to the question “how much did he leave?” is “everything.” This fact is hardly softened by the grim exception in verse 11 if the correct reading is that “*their graves*” instead of “*lands*,” are the one permanent piece of “*real estate*” that a person can own.

The Hebrew word translated “honour” is “*yeqâr*” meaning dignity or value, [same in verse 20].

Psalms 49:13-15 [New King James] *“This is the way of those who are foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings. Selah Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me. Selah”*

Death is common for all human beings but now a distinction between “worldling” and those who trust in the Creator God.

Death is portrayed in a way very similar to Jeremiah 9:21, where it climbs in at the windows to carry off the living. But we see another conquest other than death, the redemptive power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, making the death of a Christian precious in God’s eyes, [Psalms 116:15], for such an end in God’s eyes is better than our birth, [Ecclesiastes 7:8].

Our focus is directed to the first resurrection that all true Christians will experience after physical death, [1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:4-6].

Whether this vision reaches as far as the resurrection or not, it tells us of the first thing that matters beyond physical death.

Psalms 49:16-20 [New King James] *“Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself), He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. A man who is in honour, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish.”*

We return to the question that was put in **verse 5**, now with stronger grounds for the answer. **There is no promise that the rich and proud person will have the “upper hand” they are used to having, only a statement that their honour [value or dignity] cannot last.**

Their reward, such as they are, are summed up in **verse 18**, there is nothing more.

This is a powerful call for courage and clear-sighted faith in the Creator God who alone has power to preserve us through and after physical death.

Remember the purpose of this Psalm as stated in **verse 1**, that all may hear and understand enough to take immediate action in our lives.

Selah – pause and meditate on the importance of what we have just read.