

Life and Money

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- [0 : 0 0] The reading is on page 571 of the Church Bibles, and it's Psalm 49. For the director of music of the Sons of Korah, a psalm.
- Hear this, all you people. Listen, all who live in the world, both low and high, rich and poor alike. My mouth will speak words of wisdom. The meditation of my heart will give you understanding.
- I will turn my ear to a proverb. With a harp I will expound my riddle. Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches?
- No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them. The ransom of a life is costly. No payment is ever enough so that they should live on forever and not see decay.
- For all can see that the wise die, and that the foolish and the senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves.
- [1 : 1 1] People, despite their wealth, do not endure. They are like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers who approve their sayings.
- They are like sheep that are destined to die. Death will be their shepherd. But the upright will prevail over them in the morning. Their forms will decay in the grave, far from the princely mansions.
- But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead. He will surely take me to himself. Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases, for they will take nothing with them when they die.
- Their splendor will not descend with them. Though while they live, they count themselves as blessed, and people praise you when you prosper. They will join those who have gone before them, who will never again see the light of life.
- People who have wealth but lack understanding are like the beasts that perish. I hope that raised a smile there. Edie Amen, of course, called himself the last king of Scotland.
- [2 : 1 7] Well done. Congrats. Let me pray for us as we start. So, Father, we pray that you'd help us think through giving tonight.
- We pray that we'd be wise with our wealth. Amen. Well, I wonder how that little video made you feel there, or whatever you thought of them.
- They're two characters, Donald Trump, Idi Amin, who perhaps have dubious reputations. Idi Amin certainly does. He doesn't have a good reputation.
- But they were people, they are people, who are enormously powerful, Idi Amin's now past, who had influence, and they had money, lots of money.
- But they perhaps were dubious, and they were in charge of people. How does that make you feel, knowing that people who are enormously rich have enormous power?

[3 : 18] And that's really the question that drives the psalm that we heard read earlier. So, if you've got your Bibles open, I wonder if you might just hold them open there.

And we're looking at verses 5 and 6, and we've got an outline in that little green sheet there. So, let's just look at verse 5 and 6. Then, why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches?

It's not just that these people are rich, but they're wicked. They're wicked deceivers. Not only are they rich and wicked, but they are in charge.

They've got control over your lives. And so, the psalmist talks about them having brought evil days on the psalmist. These people are making life tough for the psalmist.

Now, our situation might not be like someone living in Uganda in the 70s, under Idi Amin, but in lots of ways, when we see our friends around us prospering, we see that as a threat to our happiness, our hopes, and our ambitions.

[4 : 38] And that causes us to react a certain way. So, I've got a friend. He was a medic down in London. He was doing his consultancy training under a chap who had the great nickname, The Career Killer.

Because if you ever got on the wrong side of him, you were certain to have your career killed off and you'd find yourself doing medicine in South Georgia or the Outer Hebrides or something.

Not the Outer Hebrides are a good thing. I'd go for it. Or you might think, what if my friends get that good summer internship? What if they've got that good sponsorship from that big company?

Then they seem to be on the right track to success. I won't be able to get that. They'll be able to buy that big house in Heinlein that I want to buy someday.

They'll be the chaps with the good reputation in their field. They'll be the beenock, the big name on campus or job. They'll be able to go on all the holidays that they want to, whenever they want to.

[5 : 38] They'll be able to afford that dream wedding and marry that right partner, the person who's gone to the right school with the right background. And our temptation is when we see their success, the success of others, we see that as a threat to our own happiness and ambitions.

All that stuff that makes Instagram feeds and Facebook feeds glitter. And these things make us fearful and overawed about the future.

And the temptation for us is when we get fearful and overawed, we cling on to wealth. Rather than being generous, rather than being generous with our time and everything that we have, we turn into hoarders and not givers.

And we think that money will be the thing that will save us, that we'll find security and happiness in money rather than God.

And the psalmist, he's writing a wisdom psalm because he wants us to think wisely about wealth and how to make wise investments in this life.

[6 : 52] And the psalmist, he wants us to grasp after wealth, not grasp after wealth, but to grasp after God. And so as we think on Giving Sunday, it's perhaps helpful to think through these things of wealth and success and how we can be wise and generous with what God has given us.

God has given us everything, hasn't he? As a sign that we're trusting him and that we're not placing our trust in our wealth for our future hope and happiness.

You can see it's a wisdom psalm by verse 5, can't you? So what does he ask in verse 5? Why should I be afraid? He's asking that ironically because the psalmist is confident.

He is displaying wisdom. And this confidence, it comes from a riddle, a proverb, the answer to which has been given to him, it's been revealed to him.

So here's something that he wants us to listen to. It's something that we all need to hear. Hear you, peoples of the world. Something that we all need to understand.

[7 : 59] It's something that we all need to respond to. And now he's going to sing about it. So he picks up his harp.

And the first thing that he wants us to understand, and we're in our green sheet there, is understanding life this side of the grave. Money can't save you.

Well, I'm a child of the 90s. One of my favorite films from the 90s was Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey. There's a sequel being released this summer. You'll know about it in August.

Bill and Ted Face the Music. And it's the movie that launched Keanu Reeves. And basically, Keanu Reeves is this madcap character with his friend Ted.

So he's Bill, he's Ted. And in the movie, Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey, they accidentally die. And they meet with the Reaper, the Grim Reaper. And Ted goes, dude, we're dead.

[8 : 53] And the Grim Reaper's got this great line. It doesn't matter if you're a king or a street sweeper. Sooner or later, you'll dance with the Reaper. Because it's a mad movie, they come up with a scheme to get out of being dead so they can go back and save the world and the girls that they're after.

And so what they decide to do is they're going to play death at a game. And it's not a serious game like chess. They play death at battleships. And lo and behold, they win.

And then they play death at Cluedo. And they win. And death keeps on changing the rules. And eventually, they play death at Twister. And they win. And the thing that makes that joke funny is that the idea that you can make a deal with death, that you can play death at something, at a game, and that death will let you go.

And the joke works because we know that you can't. Everyone knows that. You can't make a deal with death. You can't bribe or buy your way out of death.

And this is the first part of the riddle, of the revelation that the psalmist is singing about, that you can't escape death, no matter how rich you are. Money is useless.

[10 : 11] So just turn back to verse 7 to 9. And let's look at that. I'll just read that through for us. No one can redeem the life of another or give to God the ransom for.

The ransom for a life is costly. No payment is ever enough so that they should live on forever and not see decay. And to ransom or redeem is just an old-fashioned way of someone paying the price to free someone from captivity, how you might pay a hostage-taker to let someone go.

And what the psalmist is saying is, we might put all our hopes on money, on wealth for happiness, but the psalmist says, no money in the world can save you from the grave.

And the message of verse 7 is that even if we're very brave, even if we're very noble, and we give our lives the thing that's most precious, eventually for another person, eventually we will die.

And they will die. Maybe not immediately, but eventually, that person who we've given everything for, they will die. No one can redeem another person's life.

[11 : 28] No payment is ever enough. There's nothing you can do to save another person. No money is enough. And so the first thing that the psalmist wants us to understand is that we must not put our hopes and dreams on money and wealth, or anything in this world, the things of this life.

The second thing that the psalmist wants us to understand is that if money can't save us from death, we can't even take it with us into the next realm, into the grave.

So that's our second point. Understanding life in the grave, you can't take money with you. And, well, I wonder if you've been following the American election.

Some nods, maybe not. And one of the factors that's marked the election this year is that all the candidates are in their 70s. There's no one young in the American election.

And that is because they're all in their 70s because they know that death is coming, and they can't take anything with them from this life.

[12 : 37] And so most noticeably, Mike Bloomberg, he's since withdrawn, but before withdrawing, he spent half a billion dollars on his election campaign, on the hope that he might make the running and be elected.

And he was happy to spend that because he was in his 70s, and he knows that he can't take money with them. That's what the psalmist says. So look down at verse 10.

For I can see that the wise die, the foolish and the senseless, they all perish, leaving their wealth to others and then again, verse 16 to 17.

Don't be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases, for they will take nothing with them when they die. Their splendor will not descend with them.

And because we know that death is coming, and because we know that we can't take money with us, we try to hang on to this life. We try to build a legacy. We try to escape death by building stuff, doing stuff, making a name for ourselves.

[13 : 45] So look at verse 11, the end of verse 11. Though they had named, their tombs will remain, their houses were there, their dwellings for endless generations, even though they had named lands after themselves.

And so what do we do? We name stuff after us. We build monuments. We discover stuff. We explore. Because we want to hang on to life.

Because we know that death is coming. And that we can't take money and anything with us. And we're all doing this to escape death.

And it's foolish to do that, isn't it? So I'm going to cast your mind back to GCSE English. You might remember one of the poems that you maybe studied, if you're anything like, if the British education system is like the South African education system, you study Ozymandias by Shelley.

And it's a poem about this chap who goes through the desert. And he finds this giant monument in the desert. And on the pedestal of this monument, Shelley writes, and on the pedestal, these words appeared.

[14 : 55] My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair. And it sounds very impressive, this massive monument, with these very impressive words.

Here's someone to be emulated. But then Shelley goes on. Nothing besides remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away.

That person's monument was pointless, absolutely futile, trying to make a name for themselves. And the irony for us is, the only name that we will leave behind, the only monument that we will leave, is what does the psalmist say?

Their tombs will be their houses forever. It is our gravestones, and even those will fade. Will fade. And so, the psalmist, he sums up all these observations, in verse 12.

And he says, people, despite their wealth, do not endure. They're like the beasts, that perish. And so, what's the psalmist saying? He's saying, don't be afraid, of those who seem to succeed in life.

[16 : 14] Don't be afraid, of those who put their hope, in money. Why? Because money can't save you, and you can't take money with you.

The psalmist, then, he has a third revelation, that he wants us to understand, so that we can live wisely in this life, and think about money wisely, and so that we can live with confidence, and meaning, not being afraid.

And that is, and this is our third point, that we need to understand, that there's life, beyond the grave, and that only God, can ransom you.

And this understanding, that there's life, beyond the grave, and that God ransoms, gives us confidence. And it's this understanding, that separates us, who are confident, from those, who are not confident.

So look at the last verse, of the psalm, verse 20. And notice the difference, between that, and verse 12. People who have wealth, but lack understanding, are like those beasts, that perish.

[17 : 25] And so, look at how the psalmist, describes those, who don't, have understanding, whose money won't endure, and who don't understand, that there is, life beyond the grave.

How does he describe them, in verse 14? Right at the start. They are like sheep, and they are destined, to die. And being described, as a sheep, is not really, a very flattering, image.

Sheep, follow the crowd. Sheep have no, discernment. They lack understanding, and they need, a shepherd. But notice, what the psalmist, goes on to say, in verse 14.

It's not that these sheep, don't have a shepherd. They have a shepherd, but not any shepherd, you and I, would ever want. Death, is their shepherd.

And it's an incredibly, sinister, image. He's the kind of shepherd, who will lead you, into a place, where you don't, want to go. He will abandon you, to the wolves, into the wilderness.

[18 : 34] But then he highlights, what it looks like, to have understanding, what life is going to look like, for those who do discern, who do have understanding. Right at the end, of verse 14, what does he say?

But the upright, will prevail, over them, in the morning. And then again, in verse 15, but God, will redeem me, from the realm, of the dead.

And take me, to himself. So those, who have understanding, who know that there's, life beyond the grave, that God will ransom them, they trust God, to redeem them, and ransom them.

In the upright there, they're not, those, who are perfect. He's not speaking, about those, who've never done, anything wrong. But he means, those who are, trusting God. And that God will judge, the living, and the dead.

He means, those who turn, to God, for rescue, from death. And the upright, the psalmist says, God will redeem them, and take them, to himself.

[19 : 41] They will escape death, and they will know, life, beyond the grave. And being upright, is the only currency, that is accepted, and life, beyond the grave.

And so, notice the reason, that psalmist gives, that we can have confidence, beyond the grave. It's not through anything, that the psalmist does. He doesn't do anything.

But it's because, God has done something, that no earthly wealth, could do. That God has redeemed him, rescued him, ransomed him, from the life, of the dead.

God has made them, upright. He's given them, the currency, that matters. He has made them, rich, in the grave. And so, here's the thing, here's the thing, that we need to understand, this evening.

That if we understand, that money can't save us, if we understand, that we can't take money, with us, if we understand, that being upright, is the only currency, that will be accepted, in life, beyond the grave.

[20 : 48] That the upright, will prevail. And if we understand, that God, is the one, who receives, who redeems, who ransoms, then that will change, everything, in life now.

It will change, our attitude, to what we do in the day, what we do tomorrow. It will change, how we think about money. It will change, what we think about, giving Sunday, about what we think about, ambition, and success.

We'll want to use our wealth, for the next life. We'll want to use our wealth, as someone who trusts, in God, to redeem them, from the grave.

And you'll want to use, your wealth, for the redemption, of others, so that they can know life, beyond the grave. We'll use it for gospel work, so that people might be saved, and know the ransom, that God gives.

But how does God, redeem? And so the psalmist, he's singing a revelation, because it's something, that he doesn't quite, understand. It's a proverb.

[21 : 57] It's a riddle to him. He doesn't quite, understand it. He understands, that God will ransom him. He understands, that God will redeem him. He knows, that it does happen, but he doesn't know how.

He knows, that money, this side of the grave, is useless. Wealth is useless. But he doesn't know, what the real currency is. He knows, that it's something to do, with being upright.

And he knows, that if we live for this life, and don't understand life, beyond the grave, then there's no hope, and that we'll perish, like the beasts. And he knows, that the question, is not about, whether you're a sheep, or not.

He knows, that we're all sheep, but about, who is your shepherd? Is it death, or someone else? Or someone else? And he knows, that there is a better shepherd, who will lead them, to life, beyond the grave.

Who will lead them, into green pastures. Who will guide them, along right paths, for his namesake. That even though, he walks, in the valley, of the shadow of death, he will feel no evil.

[23 : 05] And that surely, that shepherd's goodness, and love will follow him, all the days of his life. And that he'll dwell, in the house of the Lord, forever. Well, in the next, couple of Sundays, we'll be looking at, the gospel of John, John 10.

And we'll meet that shepherd, in the person, of Jesus Christ. So listen, how Jesus describes himself, in John chapter 10. I am, the good shepherd.

And Jesus, is the good shepherd, who comes not to take life, but to give you life, to give you wealth, to give you abundance. So he says, I have come, that they may have life, to the full.

He is the good shepherd, who redeems his people. He pays the ransom price, that we could never afford. The ransom, that God desires, isn't money, or our good works, or anything like that.

But it's, the perfect obedience, and sinless perfection, of a life, lived for God. And God's, and so we need that, if we're to ever know, life beyond the grave.

[24 : 16] And Jesus, is the shepherd, who becomes a lamb, just like one of us. Who pays the price, the ransom, with the only money, that would suffice, in life beyond the grave.

The blood of a life, lived perfectly, in perfect obedience. He gives up his life, and what does he do? He saves us, perfectly. And Jesus gave up his everything, all his heavenly riches, for you, to bring you, to God, to make you rich, in life, beyond the grave.

So Jesus, though he was rich, in love and good deeds, and everything else, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

And if we understand that, that should change, everything, in life, this side, of the grave. Let me pray for us, as we close. So Father, we thank you, that you've sent your son.

We thank you, that we can have a hope, in life, beyond the grave. Please help us, to trust in you, and not trust, in our wealth, and our ambition, and success.

[25 : 28] Please help us, to look to that, great shepherd, who will ransom us, from the grave. Jesus. Amen.