

Psalm 49 | “Our Only Hope in Life & Death”
Preached on March 31, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to Psalm 49. *[pause]*

If you know me, you know that I like to choose unique passages during holidays, and this is no different.

We are actually going to be in a psalm on Resurrection Sunday.

And the reason is because this is one of the few, clear places in the Old Testament concerning resurrection.

And of course, I will connect it with Christ’s resurrection in the end, but let’s see what it beholds for us this morning. *[pauseeee]*

I will begin by **READING** it for you. *[READ]*

One pastor talks about a time when he “saw a picture of an old burned-out mountain shack, [and] all that remained was the chimney. *[pause]*

[It was] the charred debris of what had been that family's sole possession. [pause]

In front of this destroyed home stood an old grandfather-looking man dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls.

[And] it was evident that the child was crying. [pause]

Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy.

They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology and philosophy of life. Those words were, ‘Hush child, God ain't dead!’”¹ *[pause]*

Amidst all of the pain, loss, and death in this world, what a great reminder of the hope that a Christian can have.

We need prompts like that.

We need to be reminded that even if we lost everything in this world, there is hope. *[pauseeee]*

In our passage this morning, we find that beam of hope in an Old Testament psalm.

For it will show us where our only hope in life and death is found. *[pauseeee]*

Look down at how the psalm starts in verses 1 and 2, “Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together!” *[pause]*

¹ James DeLoach, associate pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Houston, quoted in *When God Was Taken Captive*, W. Aldrich, Multnomah, 1989, p. 24. Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hope.htm>.

And then the psalmist goes on to talk about how he will speak wisdom and understanding, which will solve a riddle. *[pause]*

So in verses 1-4, he's saying...

I. Pay attention, everyone! Wisdom and truth are here! (1-4)

Have you ever sat in the airport waiting to board your plane, and all of a sudden the airport employee gets on the loudspeaker and says, "May I have everyone's attention."? *[pause]*

They share important details that everyone should listen to and heed.

They have critical information to disperse, and everyone must pay attention. *[pause]*

Well in a much bigger, more important way, it's like the psalmist grabs a megaphone and seeks to share important matters with everyone in the world. [pause]

He says, "Hear this, all peoples! Give ear, all inhabitants of the world." *[pause]*

This message is important, so heed this!

We dare not neglect this message, for it is vital.

And this message is for everyone. [pause]

All people, all inhabitants, both low and high, rich and poor.

It doesn't matter your social or economic status, you must hear this message. [pauseeee]

This teaches us that God's truth is not just for a small group, or for the social elite or financially well-off.

God has a message for all people, each and every inhabitant of the world.

The Bible has the message that the whole world needs to hear. *[pause]*

No matter if you are 3 or 93.

No matter if you have 3 dollars in your bank account or 3 million.

The Bible has an important message for everyone, and its truth goes out to all. [pauseeee]

Some people act like Christianity is a white man's religion, or that it's only for the super religious people, but these verses show us something different, don't they? *[pause]*

This message is for everyone everywhere, and it's eternally important.

So listen up, dear listener, for that means that this message is *for you*. *[pauseeee]*

It doesn't matter your past, your current social standing, or anything like that.

Truth and understanding are here found in God's Word. *[pause]*

It is God's truth that gives us this wisdom and understanding, so we see that truth comes from outside of us, not from within. *[pause]*

Are you looking for the truth?

Are you looking for wisdom and understanding?

It's found here in God's Word, the Scriptures. *[pause]*

No longer search for it in yourself, for you won't find it, and you will be disappointed time and time again.

No longer search for it in the world, for you won't discover it there, for just look at all the problems in the world that aren't solved. *[pauseeee]*

It's God's wisdom and understanding that are *true* wisdom and understanding, and they solve the riddles of life. *[pauseeee]*

The riddles that the psalmist will solve are: why do the rich seem to prosper and the righteous seem to languish?

But also, it will give us the answer to this question: what can redeem our lives from death? *[pauseeee]*

As you can see, God's truth gives us the answers to the most important questions about life and death.

So pay attention! Give ear!

Hear this, everyone who is listening this morning! *[pauseeee]*

What is it, though, that God wants us to know?...

II. Riches and possessions cannot ransom your life from death. (5-14)

This is one of the main messages of the psalm.

The writer will pound this message home to the hearts of every single person, for it makes it so clear.

It will describe in great repetition the lack of power that wealth has to save you from death. *[pauseeee]*

So many people are all about money, money, money and stuff, stuff, stuff.

They spend their lives seeking more and spending more.

Their whole lives revolve around getting that new thing, or gaining some more cash. *[pause]*

What a sad way to live!

People work their lives away, all for some extra money.

People do some sinful things, all to get that item on their Amazon wishlist. *[pauseeee]*

What about you?

How much do you think about money or what you want to get next?

How much is your life *driven* by these things? *[pause]*

Do not be fooled by their sparkly appeal, for the Word of God shows us that riches are limited in what they can do for you. *[pause]*

Do you realize that?

When you are breathing your final moments in this life, riches will not save you on your deathbed.

Riches won't give you eternal life. *[pause]*

You can't say to God, "Here, I'll give you all my money, if you would only let me continue to live."

It doesn't work that way.

The currency to buy eternal life is not money, nor anything else you own.

So what good will your wealth and possessions do you as you take your final breath? *[pauseeee]*

Riches can redeem a lot of things, but riches cannot redeem your life. *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist has struggled with how the wicked rich seem to prosper, but he reassures his heart with truth.

He says in verses 5-7, "Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?"

Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life." *[pauseeee]*

There's no need to fear the wicked wealthy, who trust in their abundance, for they won't ultimately be victorious.

Their quote-on-quote “success” and “winning” will be short-lived, so we need not fear them. *[pauseeee]*

Often, we can look around us and think that the rich and powerful, who are corrupt and seem to get away with everything, will triumph.

They oppress others and seem to skirt justice, and we can sometimes feel hopeless against them. *[pause]*

We feel this sometimes when we think, “Look at their resources -- I could never compete with that, and if I went up against them, they could easily beat me.”

But God reminds us that they will not ultimately win, for their wealth won’t do them any good in eternity. *[pause]*

Their victory and success is extremely temporary, for it’s only good in this short life.

Death will come calling, and when it does, their riches will be as valuable as dust. *[pause]*

So do not fear the wealthy, powerful, and well-off in this world, who do wickedness against you. *[pauseeee]*

But not only does this text reassure us that the wicked wealthy won’t ultimately prevail, for it also challenges *us* with how we view wealth. *[pause]*

It teaches us that riches and possessions are temporary and limited -- they do no eternal good in themselves.

You can’t trust them with your soul. *[pauseeee]*

So many people look for security in their money.

They think, “If only I can get a little bit more, I’ll be secure.” *[pause]*

And then they think, “OK, now if only I get a little more then I can feel at ease.” *[pause]*

But riches bring no spiritual, eternal security, for “no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life.”

Our lives are too costly to be ransomed with money or any other material thing. *[pauseeee]*

Because of our sin, we deserve death.²

Without Christ, we are under condemnation and under the penalty for our sin.

You can’t pay God off with some cash or with some valuables. *[pause]*

² A reference to Romans 6:23.

It will never be enough, for you have sinned against the holy, creator God. *[pause]*

It's like a murderer who is on death row.

No amount of money will cause the judge to say, "OK, he's allowed to go free now."

No, that judge would be corrupt, for the murderer deserves to be dealt with according to his crime, which is death. *[pause]*

So also, each sinner deserves eternal death for we have sinned against the eternal, glorious, creator God who made us, and your money will not suffice. *[pause]*

Your knowledge, your social standing, your family's history, and your good works all fall short of measuring up to the cost of your life. *[pause]*

All that you have combined is like a feather on a scale when an elephant is sitting on the other side of it.

Your life is too costly!

The price to ransom you from death is too steep for you to pay with anything *you* possess. *[pauseeee]*

The psalmist wants us to feel the weight of this reality, and so I want you to feel it, too. *[pause]*

All people die, and your bank account number, good works, possessions, or anything else like that, will do you no good.

As verse 10 says, "For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others." *[pauseeee]*

When you die, your money just goes to someone else, and who knows what they will do with it.

So why trust in riches?

Why spend your life being all about money and things?

Nothing in this world that you can gain will save your life. *[pauseeee]*

Death is the great leveler.

It brings the rich down to the level of the poor who also die, and they perish like the beasts.

As verse 11 mentions, it doesn't matter if they have lands named after them, their grave is their home when they die. *[pause]*

That land named after you will go on without you, but you will be in the ground.

Your wealth, honor, and fame in this life will not remain.

So how could you be all about the here-and-now? *[pause]*

How could you be all about your fame, recognition, wealth, possessions, or anything like that?

They do you no good in eternity! *[pauseeee]*

In verse 13, the psalmist says, “This is the path of those who have foolish confidence; yet after them people approve of their boasts.” *[pauseeee]*

If you trust in your wealth and possessions and things you have, you are a fool, who puts your confidence in things that aren’t reliable. *[pauseeee]*

The foolish confident may look so self-assured, calm, coolheaded, and composed, but God reveals the truth - they are fools on the path to death.

And those many who approve of their words follow their path, along with them. *[pauseeee]*

There are a lot of self-confident people in this world, who trust in themselves or their wealth.

Their image is crafted to appeal, and their words spiced up to entice. *[pause]*

They gather large crowds of followers, who approve of every word they say.

They are considered the “influencers” of this world.

People share, retweet, and spread what they say all over the place, and they make it seem like they have the answers, but they are only going down the wrong path, and leading others down it. *[pauseeee]*

Scripture is showing us that if you trust in things other than God to save your life, you are on the path of death. *[pauseeee]*

There’s no way around that truth.

You cannot trust anything for eternal security outside of the Lord.

Wealth cannot redeem you, possessions cannot bring you security, your good works fall short of being able to save you for eternity. *[pauseeee]*

This is the message that every person in the whole world needs -- without God’s intervention, you are hopeless. *[pause]*

In fact, without God, the psalmist says in verse 14, “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.” *[pauseeee]*

Now that’s a striking and strong statement, isn’t it?! *[pause]*

Those who trust in things are like sheep headed to the grave.

They are walking the path to death, and death is like their shepherd, shepherding them to it.

[pause]

Instead of God leading them *through* the valley of the shadow of death,³ death is their shepherd who leads them *to* the grave. *[pauseeee]*

If you trust in your wealth, in your possessions, in your gifts or talents, in your good works, or anything like that for eternal security - then it's like you are trusting death to shepherd you.

People don't usually think this way, but it's true. *[pauseeee]*

In your final moments in this life, all of those things will not matter...

You are not going to be thinking, "I wish I had bought that new car."

Or, "I wish I had gotten that extra thousand dollars."

No, what will matter is what happens *after* your final moments of physical life.

What will matter is eternity. *[pauseeeee]*

Do a brief search online about riches and money, and you will find a lot of videos and articles.

You will find what they call powerful secrets to getting rich, tips on how to get rich, hidden habits to a rich life, and how to become a millionaire.

They act like those things are the most important, critical things of life -- but they are not.

[pause]

The most important, critical message for all people is what God is showing us today...

Riches and possessions cannot deal with the matters of life and death. *[pause]*

Hear this, all people who hear my voice! Give ear, all inhabitants of Clearfield and beyond!

Do not ignore this reality! Do not disregard or close your ears to this all-important message!

[pauseeeee]

"The director of a medical clinic told of a terminally ill young man who came in for his usual treatment.

[And] a new doctor who was on duty said to him casually and cruelly, 'You know, don't you, that you won't live out the year?' *[pause]*

As the young man left, he stopped by the director's desk and wept.

³ A reference to Psalm 23:4.

‘That man took away my hope,’ he blurted out.

‘I guess he did,’ replied the director. ‘Maybe it’s time to find a new one.’⁴ *[pauseeee]*

The Bible may have taken away your hope in riches, possessions, or some other thing in yourself, but that’s because “it’s time to find a new one”.

You need a sure hope, and our sure hope is this...

III. Only God can ransom your life from death! (14b-20)

There’s just a small verse of hope in this psalm, but it comes shining through like a diamond laying in the dirt. *[pause]*

Amidst all of this talk of death, and how all men die, and no one can redeem his own life -- there’s this amazing statement in verse 15, “but God.” *[pause]*

What a glorious thing to hear! *[pause]*

People are on the path to death, and we perish like the beasts.

We all die, and our things can’t save us.

We can’t redeem our own lives.

“But God...” *[pause]*

In our hopelessness, in our despair, those two words are the lifeline of hope that we need!

Every single soul in the universe needs to hear those precious words. *[pauseeee]*

When you are going through a trial so great, and you don’t know what to do, remember: “but God.” *[pause]*

When you are going through the hardest, saddest moments of your life, and all seems lost: “but God” should come to your mind. *[pause]*

When you are breathing your final earthly breaths, you can say as verse 15 says, “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol.” *[pause]*

That’s our hope! *[pause]*

You cannot redeem your own life from death, it’s too costly -- but God can. *[pause]*

And for the person who trusts in Him, you not only are able to say, “God can,” but you can say, “God *will* ransom my soul from the power of Sheol.” *[pauseeee]*

⁴ *Our Daily Bread*, December 19, 1996. Found at: <https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/3209/hope-springs-eternal/>.

Isn't this such amazing grace; isn't this such a sure hope? *[pause]*

We deserve to die eternally without God.

We deserve to remain in the grave forever.

We deserve to be shepherded by death.

But God redeems our souls from death and shepherds us through the valley of death and into life forevermore. *[pause]*

You see, those who trust in the Lord, do not have foolish confidence that takes them on the path of death, but we have God-confidence, which is the path of life. *[pauseeee]*

You can have hope and confidence in your eternity!

Not based on yourself or your wealth, possessions, or good works, but based on the great, "but God," statement of Psalm 49:15. *[pauseeeee]*

"God. Will. Ransom. My. Soul." *[pause]*

God does the work of redemption; *He* does the ransoming of our lives, not us.

This is what He did through Christ! *[pause]*

We deserved eternal death, forever to be condemned, and so much more.

We couldn't ransom or save our own lives with anything, so God chose, out of love, to send His only Son to come to this earth and become one of us.

He then lived a perfect life, and died in our place for our sins to ransom us from the penalty of death.

He then rose again, conquering sin and death, and assuring us that we, too, would someday be raised. *[pause]*

This is how we are ransomed! *This* is how we can be redeemed from the power of the grave!

It's only because of what Jesus did on the cross, and then how He conquered the grave that we can live! *[pause]*

As Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."⁵ *[pauseeee]*

Because of Jesus and God's work in raising Him up from the dead, we have hope because of our union with Him through faith!

⁵ John 11:25.

Paul says elsewhere, "...he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."⁶ *[pauseeee]*

God will redeem and take us to Himself, for verse 15 says, "for he will receive me."

The word really has the idea of taking us, that is, taking us to himself like Enoch was "taken" by God.⁷

We have an eternity with God promised. [pauseee]

Death is not the end!

Eternal life is secured through Christ, who paid the ransom by dying in our place and then rising again.

This is what we celebrate today!

And we have hope, for because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we can know and proudly say, "God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me." *[pauseeee]*

So as the psalm finishes out in verses 16-20, it reminds us that we don't need to fear or fret over the wicked wealthy.

They don't have a sure hope, but you do. [pause]

He carries nothing away when he dies, and his glory goes down with him.

He thinks he's blessed, and even gets praised by others, but his end is sure.

But if you trust in Christ alone to save you, *you* have a sure hope. *[pause]*

You have something eternally valuable that makes all the temporary riches and possessions of this life look like a millisecond of time and dust in the wind.

You have something more valuable than anything this world can offer -- you have the hope of resurrection life because Jesus died and was raised for you. *[pauseeee]*

In the end, the tables will turn on the prideful and arrogant ones, who trusted in their wealth and dealt wickedly in this life, for as verse 14 says, "the upright shall rule over them in the morning." *[pause]*

There is a glorious morning coming, when Christ will come again, all will be made right, our bodies resurrected, and we shall rule with Christ forevermore.

That is our hope -- Christ and Christ alone. [pauseeee]

⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:14.

⁷ Genesis 5:24 uses the same word as used here.

You see...

Our future hope is not found in anything else but our Lord.

You cannot ransom your own life from death, but God can, and God *will* ransom from the dead those who trust in Christ alone. *[pause]*

This is the message of the gospel, and this is the message that is eternally important, which all people everywhere need to hear and heed.

And so that means *you* need to hear and respond to this message. *[pauseeee]*

Some people respond to this message, saying, “Sorry, not now, maybe next time,” but who knows if there will be tomorrow? *[pause]*

Others say, “I’ve got too many other things to think about,” but what’s more important than life and death? *[pause]*

And still others say, “Nah, I’m good. I’ll pass,” because they are concerned only with the here-and-now. *[pause]*

What’s your response to this message?

Rejection of Christ and trust in self? Or trust in Christ alone, who did the work of redemption for you? *[pauseeee]*

When you are laying on your deathbed, what will be your hope? *[pause]*

“A little over a month before he died, the famous atheist Jean-Paul Sartre [SAR-TRAH] declared that he so strongly resisted feelings of despair that he would say to himself, ‘I know I shall die in hope.’

Then in profound sadness, he would add, ‘But hope needs a foundation.’”⁸ *[pause]*

Praise be to God, our hope has a foundation -- the ransom that Jesus paid for our lives on the cross, and His powerful resurrection from the dead.

And all those who simply turn from their sins and trust in Christ alone and His work are ransomed, forgiven, saved, set free, and given everlasting life.

Is Christ your hope in life and death?

⁸ *Our Daily Bread*, April 17, 1995. Found at: <https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/3203/famous-athiest/>