

Psalm 49

Title: The Folly of Trusting in Riches

Author and Date: The Sons of Korah

Key Verses: Psalm 49:6, 10, 13

Type: Didactic (Instruction)

Outline

- A. Introduction (verses 1-4).
- B. What riches cannot buy (verses 5-12).
- C. Where riches cannot go (verses 13-20).

Notes

Title: “For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.” See the notes on Psalm 42. The following psalms have something similar to this title: Psalm 42, 44-49, 84-85, and 87-88.

Summary: Psalm 49 is a didactic (instruction) psalm or a wisdom psalm (see verse 3). It warns against trusting in wealth and boasting in riches (verse 6). It is folly to trust in riches (verses 10 and 13). Psalm 49 deals with two important topics in life: money and death. People are not to fear the rich who surround them (verses 5 and 16), because there are limitations to wealth and riches. First, those who trust in wealth cannot prevent their own death (verses 5-12). Second, their wealth cannot go with them when they die (verses 13-20). This psalm is very relevant for our present-day prosperous time.

Verses 1-4: These verses act like an introduction and make it a unique feature of this psalm. Here, the psalmist calls upon all people, rich and poor, to hear his wise words of instruction. He is dealing with a universal problem: money and death. The “wisdom” and “understanding” (verse 3) and the “parable” and “dark saying” (verse 4) all refer to the perplexing problem that the psalmist wants to deal with. His main lesson is about the folly of trusting in wealth and boasting in riches (verse 6). This particular lesson would be taught while playing “upon the harp” (verse 4). Note the parallelism between verse 1 (all ye peoples) and verse 2 (low, high, rich, poor) and the parallelism between verse 3 (wisdom, understanding) and verse 4 (parable, dark saying).

Verse 5: The psalmist begins the teaching portion of this psalm with a question: “Wherefore?” or “Why?” He is not speaking of his own iniquity, but the iniquity of the wealthy who surround him. Compare the following: “When wicked deceivers surround me” (NIV), “When the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me” (ESV), and “When the

iniquity of my foes surrounds me” (NASV). Wealthy foes are not to be feared because they cannot prevent their own death (see also verse 16).

Verse 6: This verse is the key to understanding the psalm. It is not riches per se that is the problem, but *trusting* in wealth and *boasting* in riches. The *love* of money, not money, is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Verses 7-9: Wealth and riches cannot “redeem” or “ransom” anyone from the grave. Money cannot buy a person more time or prevent his death. Death is certain to all.

Verse 10: The “fool” is the person who trusts in riches (see also “folly” in verse 13).

Verse 12: Man is like the “beasts that perish” in the sense that man dies like the beasts (Eccl. 3:19). See also verse 20.

Verse 13: The psalmist says the rich who trust in their wealth are foolish, and yet, there are those who still approve of their foolish behavior. For “Selah” (here and verse 15), see the notes on Psalm 3.

Verse 14: “Flock” and “shepherd” are figures used to describe the rich being led to death. The “upright” have dominion over the rich because they have a better reward after they die. They will be raised “in the morning” to a resurrection of eternal life.

Verse 15: Old Testament saints had a partial understanding of life after death (Psa. 16:10; 73:24). Job made a similar statement in Job 19:25-27. Note the words “But God will redeem”. Only God can provide life beyond the grave.

Verse 18: The rich man praises himself and others praise him, but when he dies he cannot take his wealth with him.

Questions

1. What does the psalmist request (verse 1)?
2. Who does the psalmist want to listen to him (verse 2)?
3. How does the psalmist speak (verses 3-4)?
4. What question does the psalmist ask at the beginning of his lesson (verse 5)?

5. What kind of rich person is the psalmist talking about (verse 6)?
6. What do those who trust in riches fail to do (verses 7-9)?
7. What happens to one's wealth when he dies (verse 10)?
8. What is the thinking of those who trust in riches (verse 11)?
9. What happens to the man of honor and what is he like (verse 12)?
10. How does the psalmist describe those who trust in riches (verse 13)?
11. How does the psalmist describe the rich who are headed to the grave (verse 14)?
12. What does the psalmist believe God will do to him (verse 15)?
13. Who is not to be feared (verse 16)?
14. What happens to one's wealth when he dies (verse 17)?
15. What does the rich man do to himself (verse 18)?
16. Where are the rich headed and what is the man of honor like (verses 19-20)?

Applications for Today

1. God gives us his divine wisdom and understanding. Are we willing to hear it and give ear to it (verses 1-4)? What wisdom did Paul and the Apostles speak (1 Cor. 2:6-7)? How is God's wisdom given to mankind (Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:9)? What kinds of wisdom are there in the world (Jas. 3:15-17)?
2. Trusting in wealth and boasting in riches leads to problems (verse 6). What woe does Jesus pronounce in Luke 6:24? Why should one beware of covetousness (Lk. 12:15-21)? What did Jesus say about the rich young ruler (Mk. 10:23-24)? What is the "love of money" and what will it do to the person who has it (1 Tim. 6:9-10)? What can riches do to a local church (Rev. 3:17)? Do all rich people trust in their riches (Mt. 27:57; Lk. 19:2)?
3. Wealth has its limits. Money cannot buy everything (verses 7-9). What kind of treasures do we need to be laying up (Mt. 6:19-20)? What did the rich man not have when he died (Lk. 16:19-31)? What is more precious than silver and gold (1 Pet. 1:18-19)?
4. We cannot take our riches with us when we die (verses 10-11 and 16-17). What are rich Christians told to do with their wealth in this life (1 Tim. 6:6-8, 17-19)?
5. Death is impartial. All die alike (verses 10, 12, and 20). What comes after death (Heb. 9:27)?