

Psalm 49: The Wise and the Foolish with Wealth

Expository Lessons from the Psalms

I. Intro

- a. Today we will be studying **Psalm 49**, designated **Psalm 48** in the LXX.
- b. This is a parable/riddle about riches.
 - i. The Scriptures (OT/NT/Jesus) keep it simple: there are wise people and foolish people when it comes to money and wealth.
 - ii. My goal today: to use the Scriptures to expose the foolishness of riches and how God wants us to use them.
 - iii. Many are led into sin around money issues. I hope today will help us be wise and avoid Satan's traps that can have significant consequences on our eternity!
 - iv. In my work, I spend lots of time around people with wealth. These teachings are ones I personally need to continue to be reminded of!
- c. Read **Luke 8:4-15**
 - i. Jesus desires His Kingdom to be filled with fruit! What a beautiful picture. (tomato harvest example)
 - ii. He was very concerned about things that would prevent this fruit from growing: one of these was the third soil – the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth:
 1. “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked [the seed].” (**vs. 7**)
 2. “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.” (**vs. 14**)
 - iii. This is a HUGE problem in the United States, including here in Boston. We are not facing intense persecution. But Satan has a strategy for everyone, to keep Christians from being abundantly fruitful.
 - iv. Jesus is crying out that we might hear and understand the mysteries of the Kingdom!

- d. I will be reading from a version based on the LXX (Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures), which is similar, but different from the Masoretic text (based on the Hebrew OT Scriptures) in some significant ways. I believe there are some real treasures for us to mine in the LXX text.
 - i. (We have talked significantly about the fact that Jesus and the apostles quoted the LXX most frequently. I will not add any more to that here, but you can learn more about the LXX on our website www.walking-by-faith.org.)
- e. **Read Psalm 49** (48 in the LXX)

II. Psalm 49/48

- a. **Vs. 1-5:** The Psalmist has wisdom to share with all those on earth, rich and poor. "Hear this!"
 - i. He is going to share this wisdom by parable and riddle!
 1. See **Psalm 78 (77 in LXX)**
 - a. "I shall open my mouth in parables; I shall speak of hidden things from of old."
 - b. Then shares the story of Israel through the desert, a parable of the Christian life. (**1 Corinthians 10**)
 2. Is there a riddle/parable in **Psalm 49**?
 - a. I believe so: a story with a spiritual truth, often with a twist/surprise.
- b. "What shall I fear in an evil day?" (**vs. 6**)
 - i. This psalm speaks of **death** (the evil day).
 1. Question: What shall I fear?
 - a. Answer: nothing! God will redeem my soul from the hand of Hades. (**vs. 16**)
 - b. But, most of this psalm focuses on the fool, who lacks understanding.
- c. Characteristics of these foolish people:
 - i. Boast/trust in their wealth

1. Wealth allows you to do stuff, buy stuff, grow stuff, etc. Wealth gives power and the ability to accomplish things. Very easy to begin putting trust in wealth, abilities, glory, etc.
- ii. They acknowledge God when they are blessed
 1. "... for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust..." (**Matthew 5:45**)
 2. They have a form of godliness, saying prayers, thanking God for what they have been given, but they are wicked in God's eyes!
- iii. Their souls are blessed in their lifetimes
 1. "Money can't buy you happiness" is wrong!
 2. Our souls can receive blessings from \$.
 - a. Healthy, good food
 - b. Good medical care
 - c. Meet the needs of loved ones
 - d. Remarkable vacations – see the beauty of the earth, pleasurable, comforting
 - e. Takes away concerns/worries/stress
- iv. Are being led like sheep to their death (sheep don't realize when they are being led to their death)
- v. When they die, they are unable to bring any of their riches/glory with them
 1. Only the body is going in a coffin or will be cremated. Nothing else is going with us.
 2. The estate planning document: memorandum of personal tangible property, makes this very real!
 3. Imagine going on a trip for a week and you forget your suitcase with your essentials.
 4. The riches and glory that helped them throughout their lives will not be available or helpful at death.
- vi. Their graves will be their homes forever
- vii. They leave their wealth to strangers

- viii. Their riches cannot redeem their souls
 - 1. “A brother does not redeem; shall a man redeem?”
 - 2. A brother is supposed to redeem his poor brother (**Leviticus 25**) from debt or slavery, but a person cannot redeem his own soul!
 - ix. The upright will eventually rule over them
 - x. They do not understand and are foolish/senseless, like the beasts/cattle
- d. The parable of the foolish and the wise (**vs. 6-12**)
- i. Different in the Masoretic (Hebrew) text: “For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.” (vs. 10 in MT)
 - 1. MT speaks of wise men dying like everyone else, nothing different between the wise man and foolish man.
 - 2. *LXX makes a distinction between the wise and the foolish.*
 - ii. **The foolish people**, who boast in their wealth and trust in their power, they shall not redeem their souls with their wealth, will go to their graves continually (to their great surprise!), but...
 - iii. **the wise people** do not see decay when they die. Their souls are redeemed.
 - 1. “And he rested forever, and shall live to the end, Because he will not see decay when he sees wise men die.” (**vs. 10** in LXX)
 - a. LXX speaks of one who does not see corruption/decay (of the body of wise people) when wise people die.
 - b. Reference to the resurrection of the body.
 - c. “God will redeem my soul from the hand of Hades.” (**vs. 16**)
 - 2. Origin (Against Celsus) uses this passage to distinguish the wise from the foolish man; and the wisdom of God from the wisdom of the earth.
 - a. “According to the foregoing, then, the one kind of wisdom is human, and the other divine. Now the ‘human’ wisdom is that which is termed by us the wisdom of the ‘world,’ which is ‘foolishness with God;’

(**1 Corinthians 1**) whereas the “divine”—being different from the “human,” because it is “divine”—comes, through the grace of God who bestows it, to those who have evinced their capacity for receiving it....

- b. This opinion, moreover, is truly an ancient one, its antiquity not being referred back, as Celsus thinks, merely to Heraclitus and Plato. **For before these individuals lived, the prophets distinguished between the two kinds of wisdom. It is sufficient for the present to quote from the words of David what he says regarding the man who is wise, according to divine wisdom, that ‘he will not see corruption when he beholds wise men dying.’**
 - i. Origen, “Origen against Celsus” (ANF 4.579)
3. So, the foolish man’s wealth and glory do not save him, but the wise man’s body will not see decay, and his soul will be redeemed.
- a. “Yet God will redeem my soul From the hand of Hades when he shall receive me.” (**Psalm 48:16**)
 - b. This hints at the resurrection of the dead as we see throughout the Scriptures:
 - i. Of the body (will ultimately not see decay)
 - 1. “For you will not abandon my soul to Hades Nor allow your Holy One to see corruption.” (**Psalm 15:10**)
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 15.**
 - ii. And soul (which God redeems)
 - 1. “...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (**1 Peter 1:18-19**)
4. Note: this psalm is addressed to the rich and the poor! (**vs. 3**)

- a. Bad news: the poor and rich alike can put trust/hope in wealth.
 - b. The good news: the poor and rich alike can be wise and have the hope that they will not see decay.
- e. From honorable sons to fools
- i. “A man being in honor did not understand; He was compared to the senseless cattle, and became like them.” (**vs. 13 in LXX**, repeated in **vs. 21**)
 1. MT is different
 - a. “Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.” (**vs. 12 in MT**)
 - b. LXX speaks of a man who, although in honor, did not understand. He became like the senseless cattle/beasts.
 2. Man has the choice to go from honor/glory to shame/sin.
 - a. “But the wheat and the chaff, being inanimate and irrational, have been made such by nature. But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff. Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned, because, having been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, giving himself over to every earthly spirit, and serving all lusts; **as says the prophet, “Man, being in honour, did not understand: he was assimilated to senseless beasts, and made like to them.”**
 - i. Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies,” (ANF 1.466).
 - ii. Points he is making:
 1. Man was made in honor like God, with the ability to choose (good and evil).
 2. Man was created a rational being with power over his decisions.

3. But he chose to be irrational, lost his rationality by choosing sin (including pursuing trust in wealth and glory).
 4. He was made in honor but did not understand and became like the stupid animals, quoting **Psalm 49**.
- b. “For as, among men, those sons who disobey their fathers, being disinherited, are still their sons in the course of nature, but by law are disinherited, for they do not become the heirs of their natural parents; so in the same way is it with God,—those who do not obey Him being disinherited by Him, have ceased to be His sons. Wherefore they cannot receive His inheritance... (after quoting several scriptures)... **Wherefore the prophet David says, “Man, being placed in honour, is made like unto cattle.”** (Psalm 39)
 - c. ... But when [God’s people] should be converted and come to repentance, and cease from evil, they should have power to become the sons of God, and to receive the inheritance of immortality which is given by Him.
 - d. ... but when they have apostatized and fallen into transgression, they are ascribed to their chief, the devil—to him who first became the cause of apostasy to himself, and afterwards to others.
 - i. Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus against Heresies” (ANF 1.525)
3. The fool exchanges his honor (as God’s son or daughter) for foolishness, to become like the wild beasts, to become the son or daughter of the devil!
 - a. The wise do not do this. They know that wealth and glory bring them no help in the evil day.

III. Jesus’ teaching: both directly and by parables

- a. Jesus taught directly (and often) about wealth. He knew it would be a temptation for us, as it was for Him! (tempted with all the riches of the world)
 - i. Read **Luke 6:20-21; 24-25**. Woe to the rich.

- ii. Jesus' teaching here simply amplifies what was taught in the Old Testament.
 1. "Since, therefore, 'woe' is a word indicative of malediction, or of some unusually austere exclamation; and since it is by Christ uttered against the rich, I shall have to show that the Creator is also a despiser of the rich, as I have shown Him to be the defender of the poor, in order that I may prove Christ to be on the Creator's side in this matter, even when He enriched Solomon. But with respect to this man, since, when a choice was left to him, he preferred asking for what he knew to be well-pleasing to God—even wisdom—he further merited the attainment of the riches, which he did not prefer.
 2. The endowing of a man indeed with riches, is not an incongruity to God, for by the help of riches even rich men are comforted and assisted; moreover, by them many a work of justice and charity is carried out.
 3. **But yet there are serious faults which accompany riches; and it is because of these that woes are denounced on the rich, even in the Gospel. 'You have received,' says He, 'your consolation;' that is, of course, from their riches, in the pomps and vanities of the world which these purchase for them.**
 4. Accordingly, in Deuteronomy, Moses says: "Lest, when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, as well as thy silver and thy gold, thine heart be then lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God." (**Deuteronomy 8**) (In similar terms, when king Hezekiah became proud of his treasures, and gloried in them rather than in God before those who had come on an embassy from Babylon, (the Creator) breaks forth against him by the mouth of Isaiah: "Behold, the days come when all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store, shall be carried to Babylon." (**Isaiah 39**))
 5. So by Jeremiah likewise did He say: "Let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glories glory in the Lord." (**Jeremiah 9**)
 6. Similarly against the daughters of Zion does He inveigh by Isaiah, when they were haughty through their pomp and the abundance of their riches, just as in another passage He utters His threats against the proud and noble: "Hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth, and down to it shall descend

the illustrious, and the great, and the rich (this shall be Christ's 'woe to the rich'); and man shall be humbled," even he that exalts himself with riches; "and the mighty man shall be dishonoured," even he who is mighty from his wealth. (**Isaiah 5**)

7. Concerning whom He says again: "Behold, the Lord of hosts shall confound the pompous together with their strength: those that are lifted up shall be hewn down, and such as are lofty shall fall by the sword." And who are these but the rich? Because they have indeed received their consolation, glory, and honour, and a lofty position from their wealth. (**Isaiah 10**)
8. In **Psalm 48** He also turns off our care from these, and says: "Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, and when his glory is increased: for when he shall die, he shall carry nothing away; nor shall his glory descend along with him." So also in **Psalm 61**: "Do not desire riches; and if they do yield you their lustre, do not set your heart upon them."
9. Lastly, this very same woe is pronounced of old by Amos against the rich, who also abounded in delights. "Woe unto them," says he, "who sleep upon beds of ivory, and deliciously stretch themselves upon their couches; who eat the kids from the flocks of the goats, and sucking calves from the flocks of the heifers, while they chant to the sound of the viol; as if they thought they should continue long, and were not fleeting; who drink their refined wines, and anoint themselves with the costliest ointments." (**Amos 6**)
 - a. Tertullian, "The Five Books against Marcion" (**ANF 3.368-369**)

b. Jesus' parables

i. The Rich Fool

1. Read **Luke 12:13-21**

a. Context: greed/covetousness

- i. "for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

b. Key line:

- i. "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat,

drink and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

- c. The punch line/moral: “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”
- d. What does it mean to be “rich toward God”?
 - i. We each need to wrestle with this.
 - ii. Our flesh craves to be at ease and to be merry.
- e. Vladimir’s text yesterday.
 - i. “Hey guys, I’m back again regarding Haiti, sadly. This week has been hell like for the locals after the government raised the gas price to \$4.91 USD. The masses revolted and are burning almost everything down and have even barricaded the main roads with burning tires because they were not even able to afford the previous cost of living. When gas goes up the price of everything else rises. I would super appreciate if you can keep the population and the government in your prayers for their safety and the betterment of their society as a whole. Also keep in mind that life was already super expensive to reside there. It is more expensive there than to live in Boston to put it into perspective. Additionally there are no government assistance such as shelters, food pantries nor food stamps for the poor. They are literally on their own. Life in Haiti is very black and white. It’s either you are wealthy or you are not. To give you a clearer picture of their society which is made up of 11.4 million people, around 80% of the population live on less than 2 dollars a day (NPR.org), [95%] are barely making it by living paycheck to paycheck from their mediocre monthly salary and 5% are wealthy. Therefore 95% of the population are financially struggling. It is hard for many people to conceptualize that magnitude of suffering. Sadly this is how life is unfolding there and I predict even greater suffering to come.”

2. Read **Luke 12:22-34**

- a. After Jesus warns about riches, He gives a very comforting message.
- b. God really cares about us. Will provide for us. We are valuable to Him. He will provide for us, cloth us, feed us.
- c. Don't seek after these things. Don't be anxious.
- d. The Father knows we need them. Don't waste your energy in worry.
- e. "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."
 - i. Did not say it is His good pleasure to give us food and clothes (which He will do!).
 - ii. His pleasure is to give us the Kingdom of God.
- f. He gives several commands:
 - i. Sell what you have. Give alms.
 - ii. Build treasure in heaven that cannot be taken away.
 - iii. **Question:** on your personal financial balance sheet, how are you doing in the "treasure in heaven" account?

3. The Unjust Steward

- a. (for an entire lesson on this parable from **Luke 16**, see www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/topical-lessons/lessons/the-use-of-money).
- b. Read **Luke 16:9-15**
- c. This is the punch line after Jesus tells the parable of the unjust steward.
- d. The unjust steward used his master's wealth to his own advantage and was commended for it!
- e. Many have understood this parable as an admonition: use the wealth God has entrusted to you to serve

others (“make friends for yourselves”), so that you might receive the eternal rewards of the Kingdom.

f. Jesus makes several great points after the parable:

- i. Be faithful with whatever you have. (God will entrust you with more.)
- ii. Our faithfulness with unrighteous mammon is a test for how we will handle true riches.
- iii. You can’t serve two masters: God and money.
- iv. Many religious people love money. Beware of them!
- v. What is highly esteemed by men is an abomination to God.

g. Conclusion:

- i. Let’s be wise, not foolish people! Let’s have God’s understanding about money, wealth, and earthly glory.
- ii. Let us be confident that if we are wise as God defines, our bodies ultimately will not see decay. We will experience the resurrection of the dead, both body and soul!