

# Psalms 49

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] The average price of a two bedroom flat to rent in Ealing Broadway is between £1,400 and £1,600 a month.

! Some are so on a car. The average price of a car is £8,500 in South East of England. Electricity bills and gas bills go up every year, don't they?

But we find that we can absorb those increases without too much stress. Most of you own a mobile phone, except a few dinosaurs who are here. Some of you own two.

You and I, we generally buy what we want, don't we, at the supermarket. We eat out. Most of us will fly on a plane at least once this year.

We have enough money to give some of it away. We have more that we could give away if we had a pressing need. They're really strange days we live in.

[ 1 : 08 ] Our lives are wall-to-wall luxuries and we take them for granted on a daily basis. Ealing is a particularly strange suburb, isn't it? The queen of the suburbs.

Not every one of us lives in a luxurious house. But whether you do or not, and whether you're going to be able to own a home or not, if you are here this lunchtime, you are certainly rich.

I know that every single one of us can think of somebody who's richer than us, can't we? But that is no way to measure wealth. Relative to most of the citizens of this world, every single one of us in this room is loaded.

We are ridiculously wealthy. In our daily lives, we enjoy a prosperity that has been unimagined by previous generations. And it's literally unthinkable to most people alive on the earth today.

And yet it's so normal, isn't it? To us it doesn't seem strange at all. The days of wealth and blessing that we enjoy by any historical measure, or any comparative global measure, is almost certainly strange.

[ 2 : 22 ] And while our wealth presents to us unique opportunities and unique pleasures, and we ought to thank God for it, there's also great challenges and spiritual challenges. And we need to see those challenges clearly.

And Psalm 49 reminds us of some of the challenges that we face in days like ours. They are strange days indeed, but the issues that we face are not strange.

People have been facing the issues of wealth for thousands of years. People were facing them all those years ago when the sons of Korah, who wrote Psalm 49, were topping the charts in Israel.

I've always imagined the sons of Korah, and they were kind of the equivalent of the Beatles. Their lyrics were a little bit more profound than Love, Love Me Do. But they were very popular.

And in this particular song here, written by the sons of Korah in Psalm 49, they address God's people, Israel, with a word of wisdom about wealth and faithfulness to God. And so let me point out five things in this song.

[ 3 : 21 ] Number one, the promise of wealth. Because the psalm does acknowledge it. Look at verse 14. Verse 14 speaks of a kind of princely mansion that people live in.

People are house proud. It makes sense in lots of ways. We long for that. Wealth promises people that. In verse 16, it talks about the splendour of their house.

And that too is the promise of wealth, isn't it? Verse 17. His glory will not go down after him. It describes their splendour.

And that too is the promise of wealth. That the splendour of things that we own might rub off on us. The guy who owns a princely mansion will seem like a prince.

The woman who drives an expensive sports car will seem a little bit more attractive. The person wearing a really expensive suit will look better than I do in mine.

[ 4 : 19 ] Wealth brings splendour to people. But it also brings praise. Look at verse 18. For though while he lives, he counts himself blessed. And though you get praise when you do well for yourself.

That's true today. With wealth comes reputation and influence. And the aura of success. And as long as people are not corrupt or mean.

People in our society will applaud the rich. And that too is part of the promise of wealth. And yet wealth also promises more than it can deliver. And that's my second observation. The deceitfulness of wealth.

Look at verse 5. Why should I fear in times of trouble. When the iniquities of those who cheat me surround 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. For the ransom of their life is costly. And can never suffice.

[ 5 : 18 ] That he should live on forever. And never see the pit. Do you see what he's saying? Wealth has a way of persuading people. That they can control life itself.

You can start to feel that wealth can deliver us from anything we desire. To have wealth is to have life to the full. But of course it doesn't matter how much money you have.

You can't buy life. Not for yourself. Not for anyone else. Or anyone you love. If someone you love is lying terminally ill in a hospital bed. Throwing more money at it won't change the outcome.

Verse 8 says. No the payment is never enough. Some of you know this. A Titanic museum in Belfast. And when it opened. When you purchased the ticket for the first year.

The boarding pass that you got to go into the museum. Came with the real name of a passenger on the Titanic. Who was on the ship. And at the start when the museum was opened.

[ 6 : 17 ] You could pay more for your ticket. To make sure that the name on your ticket was someone who survived. That's fascinating isn't it? We'd like to think that we could pay more.

To achieve death. But you can't. And it might work that way at the museum. But it doesn't work that way in real life. And the psalm does warn us about the deceitfulness of wealth. It does hold out much promise.

Wealth does hold out much promise. But sometimes it over promises. And when it promises us life it cannot deliver. Do you remember Jesus' famous words? What good is it for someone to gain the whole world.

And yet forfeit their own soul? It's a great question. But straight after Jesus asks another question. Which is not so well remembered. He said what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

And the answer is nothing. That leads us to the third observation. And this is the psalm's major theme. It's the brevity of wealth. Number three. Because the psalm reminds us something.

[ 7 : 18 ] That we know deep down. But we prefer not to think about. Death comes to us all. Low or high. Rich or poor. Death is the great negator.

Of all prosperity and splendor. Look at verse 10. For he sees that even the wise down. The fool. And stupid alike must perish. And leave their wealth to others.

Their graves are their homes forever. Their dwelling places to all generations. Though they call lands by their own names. You can build or buy the nicest house.

You can possibly imagine. But one day like everybody else. Your house will be a coffin. And everything you've labored for. And everything you've earned will be left to someone else.

Someone who may or may not use it well. And even if there are places that are named after you. Like there are in verse 11. When you're gone. All that will remain of you is your memory.

[ 8 : 23 ] And if you try trusting in yourself. Death will be like your shepherd. Psalm says. Guarding you in death forever. Keeping you at a distance. From everything.

That you came to possess. Verse 13. This is the path of those who have foolish confidence. Yet after them people approve of their boasts. Like sheep they are appointed for shale.

And death shall be their shepherd. You go to the airport. And you go through security. You know when you get to the x-ray machine.

And you go through that little arch there. And it beeps. And then you have to go into the place. And you put your hands up. And the thing circles round. And they pull out of your pocket. Your nail scissors.

Or your Swiss army knife. What happens? Doesn't matter how precious. Your Swiss army knife is to you. Or your nail scissors. Or how much you want to keep them.

[ 9 : 20 ] Or how much sentimental value those things have. You've got two choices. You can either leave them behind. Or you don't catch the flame. And when you come to the moment of death.

To the x-ray machine of death. That is what you have to do. With everything you've come to. You either leave it behind. And all that splendour becomes a thing of the past.

Verse 17. You can't take anything with you. For when he dies he will carry nothing away. His glory will not go down after him.

You're not just like any other human being. You're like all of creation. Death comes to every creature God has made. And at that moment everything we've accomplished and become and gained in the world takes on a stark irrelevance.

Doesn't it? Like all good Beatles songs. And the sons of Korah wrote this song with a chorus. It's in verse 12. Man and his pomp will not remain. He's like the beast that perish.

[ 10 : 24 ] And then verse 20. Man and his pomp yet without understanding is like the beast that perish. And so there are two clear implications of the psalm. And these are my fourth and fifth observations.

The first one is no one should fear the wealthy. I look at verse 5.

The psalmist puts it as a rhetorical question. And here it seems to have been my not only those who are wealthy but those who are opposed to God's people. Why should I fear in times of trouble? Why? And then verse 16 we see the same ideas given in the exhortation. Listen. Be not afraid when a man becomes rich.

When the glory of his house increases. He's saying there do not be afraid. Another way another translation is do not be overawed. Because it's possible is it not to hold prosperous people and powerful people in higher regards than their character and their influence warrants.

[ 11 : 28 ] Listen to verse 16. Be not afraid when a man becomes rich. When the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away.

His glory will not go down on him. The splendour of the wealthy will only last as long as there's breath in their lungs. The logic that you find here is all over the Old Testament.

Particularly from Isaiah 51. Where it talks about not fearing mere mortals. Not that they're lesser humans. But all humans. Don't fear them. It doesn't make sense to know the great God who made heaven and earth.

Who influences all things. The God who is wealthy beyond all comparison. Who has power that outstrips all human power combined. It doesn't make sense to have God in your corner.

To have him in your corner. And yet to fear the power of men. The immortals. It doesn't make sense to know him. And be overawed by those who seem prosperous and powerful in the world. That leads very naturally to the next exhortation.

[ 12 : 30 ] Number five. That is that we should trust in God. And so that our wealth. If we are wealthy. Our confidence shouldn't be in the comfort or status that riches brings.

And even if we're not wealthy. We shouldn't find security in being connected to people who are. But we should trust the only one who can care for us. And provide for us even beyond death.

This psalm reminds us in verse 13. Of the foolishness of trusting ourselves. And then we come to the key verse. Which I think is in verse 15. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol.

For he will receive me. Death is, isn't it? The great negation of human wealth and strength. If that is true. Then God is the only sensible one to trust.

Because in the Lord Jesus Christ. And by his potent death. And by his Olympic resurrection. God declared the great negation to death itself.

[ 13 : 32 ] He conquered. He defeated. And so all who come to him. And all who find their identity in him. And hope in him. Well they have no longer any reason to fear death.

Because they are delivered from it. You see the great negation. Is negated. Do you remember what verse 7 tells us? I love this verse.

Truly no man can ransom another. Or give to God. Or give to God the price of his life. But if you know your Bible. It turns out that there is one man who can.

And he's not merely a man though. And that is why the Lord Jesus is the exception. That proves the rule stupendously. He gave his life as a ransom to God for us.

And by his resurrection. And his death. He has redeemed us. And that is exactly what verse 15 teaches us to expect. So verse 7.

[ 14 : 32 ] Truly no man can ransom another. Or give to God the price of his life. Verse 15. But God will ransom myself from the power of Sheol. And he will.

And that is the message of Psalm 49. It's a song for healing. It's a song for the strange days we live in. What does it mean for you as you go about your day this week.

And as you go back to your office. Five more things. Number one. Be wealthy by all means. This psalm is not anti-money. In fact there's nothing in the Bible I think that speaks about success. Or prosperity or wealth as being inherently bad. They're not. Sin finds its genesis in the human heart. And all its capabilities for distorted loves and broken desires come from there.

Sin is not having money. Sin is found in how we relate to money. And you will have noticed that when it begins. The psalm addresses all humans without discrimination. Look at that verse 1.

[ 15 : 33 ] All peoples. So whether you're high or low this morning. Whether you're rich or poor. However, being rich is not the issue. Be wealthy by all means. Number two. Don't be overawed by wealth. And again I think that applies both to the rich and to the poor.

That anyone who has it within their hearts. To admire someone who's wealthier than them.

Wealthier than them for the wrong reasons. And that can take many forms. It can look like envy.

That when we walk into someone's home and we covet what they have. When we see a car and we realise how old ours looks by comparison.

When we wish we were able to have the same freedoms or luxuries. Or even power to do good with our money. When we long for future security that we know someone else's wealth seems to guarantee.

It can look like envy. It can also look like insecurity. When we think that our opinion matters less than theirs because they are prosperous.

[ 16 : 35 ] When we fall over the wealthy's attention or friendship in a way that we don't do with our less influential friends. When we choose to not invite people to our house or to give them a lift.

A lift in case they see how shabby our home is or how our stuff is. It can look like insecurity but it can also look like worry. When we lose sleep and worry about whether we'll ever get a break in the London property market.

When we're constantly talking about how tough it is to get ahead in this city. And when we're fretting about what the future is going to look like for our children. It can look like worry. There's lots of ways to be overawed and to fear those who are more wealthy than us.

Envy, insecurity, worry, perhaps other things. Lots of ways we can give in to that fear. And we need to hear what the sons of Korah tell us in verse 16. Be not afraid. When a man becomes rich.

When the glory of his house increases. They'll take nothing with them when they die. They may count themselves blessed. People praise you when you prosper.

[ 17 : 45 ] But they will die like you will. I've just been preaching through Matthew 6. The Sermon on the Mount. It's a wonderful story Jesus tells us about people who pray on street corners to be noticed.

Or they fast in a way that everyone can see. Or they give money in a really public way. They're publicly generous. And do you remember what Jesus said about those people?

He said they received their reward in full. And so if you live for the praise and honour in this world. You'll get it.

But that is all you'll get. And Jesus reminds his disciples and us that there is a reward in heaven that lasts forever. And it's far more valuable. And it seems that when we're surrounded by those really prosperous people who've got no time for Jesus.

We need to remember they're receiving their reward in full now. And why would we envy somebody who's got no reward in the future? Number three.

[ 18 : 48 ] We mustn't trust in it either when it comes to wealth. Psalm 49 urges you and I. Remember it's limited. Wealth does hold out the promise of life. No one's denying that.

But it also makes promises it can't deliver. So don't be deceived that it can redeem you. It can't purchase life for you or anyone else. So it's not worthy of your trust. But there is someone who is. Number four. Trust God. You can trust God to redeem you. Matthew 20 and Mark 10. The Son of Man did not come to be served.

But to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Psalm 49. Let me read to you from 1 Peter chapter 1. And listen to this verse very carefully.

I think Peter had been reading Psalm 49. He says this. 1 Peter 1.18 and 19. Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. [ 19 : 54 ] And because of that, you can trust him with everything else. You can trust him so much that you don't need to fear or envy, feel insecure or worry.

You can trust him because he's proved himself trustworthy. Also Paul writes in Romans 8.32, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Luke 12. Jesus tells that story of the rich man. The rich man built barns and then bigger barns and then bigger barns.

But he trusted in his riches. And Jesus, I think, meditating on Psalm 49, tells us that we don't need to worry about food or clothes. Worrying won't add anything to our lives.

Look at the birds of the air, he says. Look at the flowers of the field. And God clothes them effluently and generously and beautifully. And then he says, don't you think God cares for you much more than those?

[ 20 : 55 ] Much more than those. So you can trust him. And because you can trust him, you also find in him the freedom to live for others. And then number five, at the end of that rich fool story from Luke 12, Jesus says, doesn't he, so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

There it is in a nutshell. There's the alternative. The alternative to the life of Psalm 49 is foolishness. The alternative to live that, Jesus says, is foolish.

The alternative to live life envying wealth and trusting in wealth, how he calls it, without being rich towards God, is foolishness. And so being rich towards God is a wealth worth pursuing.

It is a way of life worth chasing. And Jesus urges you to chase it. Seek his kingdom and these things will be added to you. Be rich towards God.

That is what he redeems us for. That is the life he frees you to live. That when we wean our hearts off wealth and trust in him instead, in a life of uninhibited generosity and radical obedience to Jesus, and the excitable pursuit of God's purposes in the world, that life is a life of prayer and dependence on God's word and affection for God's family.

[ 22 : 27 ] Restful contentment and unanxious joy. And so seek his kingdom. And don't be deceived by what many people trust in today.

And don't be overawed by those people who seem to have it all. Instead, rest in God and pursue him and enjoy him and trust him and live for him. And so again, let me give the last word to the Apostle Paul, who again I think was meditating on Psalm 49, when he wrote 1 Timothy 6.

He says, as for the rich in this present age, to charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy, but to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. Let's pray.