

Psalm 49: *Confidence in Death*

Tyler Velin | May 5, 2013

If you have your Bibles, would you turn with me to Psalm 49. **Pray.**

We are spending one year in the Psalms, and as we have worked through this book we have seen all sorts of different types of Psalms, we have seen penitent psalms, which draw off of the reflection of sin, we have seen psalms of thanksgiving which sing praises to God for deliverance, we have seen songs of praise which praise God according to who he is and what he has done, and we have seen some royal psalms which highlight the Kingship of David in light of the Kingship of God.

I would say that the majority of the Psalms we have looked at have been one of those four types. But Psalm 49 is different, Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm. It sound more like something you would hear in the book of proverbs than in the book of the psalms. This specific passage falls in line with a few other ones we have done here, the first Psalm comes to my mind as being distinctly wise in its context.

“Blessed is he whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on it he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in season and its leave do not wither.”

Most of the Psalms are calling us to think with the Psalmist, to worship with the Psalmist, to grieve with the Psalmist, but wisdom Psalms are telling us to listen to the Psalmist.

This Psalm was given to the choir master to be sung, and it was written by the Sons of Korah, and it is very clear, that the Psalmist wanted us to listen to him.

Ps 49:1-4

When I read this intro I can't help but think of the movie, “A Knights Tale.” The Psalmist here is Geoffrey Chaucer, the red headed herald for Sir Ulric von Lichtenshtine. He is the one who gathers people with his words and proclaims to them the wonder and might of V. L..

“Hear this all people! Give ear all inhabitants of the world. Low and high. Rich and poor. Come and hear what has to be said.”

Only with this herald, he isn't announcing a jousting champion, he is seeking to solve a riddle. The Psalmist wishes to speak wisdom, he wishes to bring understanding. He is going to apply his mind to a question and solve it to the tune of a song.

One quick thing I want to point out in this intro, is that the Psalmist wishes to take a mystery, a riddle, and make it known. He wants to bring us, everyone into a place of understanding. That is because even though there are aspects of God which are a mystery to us here on earth, he is still a God who wishes to make himself known to us.

God doesn't leave us in the dark to figure out all of life on our own, but he, in his grace and mercy wants to bring us to a place of understanding as best we can.

Now, what riddle is the Psalmist going to apply his mind to understand?

I think that there is one riddle, one question that everyone has, but most people just tuck away in the back corner of their minds.

I was listening to sports talk radio, because I'm a nerd, and the host was discussing something, and in his conversation he started talking about what would happen when he died. He said, “When I die, and I go to heaven, or whatever, I hope I get to go to heaven...” and then he just continued on.

He had absolutely zero confidence of 1.) if heaven even existed, and 2.) if he had what it would have taken to get into heaven.

This is the riddle. What is our confidence in death? While very few people openly dialogue over this question, it comes out everywhere. Movies try to answer this question, songs sing of this question, books ponder this question. And it makes sense because deep down everyone knows that they are going to die

Ecc 3:11. God has put eternity into our hearts and we all live under the weight of that.

Over the history of the church, the church has put out things called catechisms. And what catechisms are, are basically questions and answers designed to use scripture to teach doctrine to church goers.

One of the more famous catechisms is the Westminster Catechism, the first question of the Westminster Confession is: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." And then it would give scripture which proves that point.

Another famous catechism is called the Heidelberg Catechism. And what these documents are designed to do, is teach you how to answer important questions theologically. And the first question is usually the most important question. Hence the Westminster led off with, "What is the chief end of man?"

But the Heidelberg starts off in a different way. The question it chooses to lead with is this: **What is your only comfort in life and death?**

This is the only catechism which starts out with death. Starts out with the end of ones life. But this is the very question that the Psalmist is trying to bring us to understand.

Here is the Psalmists answer to the question: **49:5-9**

So the Psalmist is setting scene here. It is a scene of a death, of judgment. Where the Psalmist is surrounded by throngs of other people all waiting the final judgment, all waiting to see if they will be awarded eternal life and he says, "Why should I fear in this moment."

He looks around and he sees the wealthy, he sees the powerful, he sees the community service leaders, mayors, governors and presidents. People who boast in their riches, they boast in their accomplishments and accolades. He is surrounded by people just like that sports talk host. People who think that they would be granted entrance into heaven for what they have done. For what they have accomplished.

Many people in the church today would be intimidated to stand where this Psalmist is standing. They look around and they see people whose tithe checks have a couple extra digits in them. People who have given land and donations to the church. They see community center builders, Christian school boosters, and Bible-Belt millionaires.

You can sense that the widow in Mark 12 felt this way. Jesus says that he was watching people give their tithes, and all of these wealthy people are depositing these huge sums of wealth into the treasury. And then this widow sneaks up, amidst the crowd, and deposits two coins not even worth a penny each. She probably didn't have a whole lot of confidence in that moment. She probably didn't feel like if the decision came down to here and a wealthy person that she would receive the benefit. Yet Jesus himself said that she had given more than all of the other people.

Yet the Psalmist has great confidence among all of these wealthy and powerful crowds because of what he said in verses **7-9**.

No man can ransom another. Death is a very hunger lender. Death knows no wealth, it honors no power, it holds no aristocracy. Death takes and is never satisfied.

When you sit at the judgment seat you sit naked. Stripped of all the things you boasted in here on this earth. But unfortunately, we don't realize that here. We boast much of our earthly things. We rely on our earthly riches, but the psalmist says that does nothing.

We all die, and there is nothing you can do out of your wealth, out of your power, out of your accomplishments that will ransom your life. You can't pay off your iniquities. Really that's what it comes down to. That's the scene the Psalmist is painting, it's not just about paying off the grim reaper in terms of breath in your lungs, it's paying off the devil in terms of your iniquities. It is iniquity that surrounds the psalmist, and it is riches that those around him which to give as a ransom for their lives.

But no man can ransom another. We sit condemned. Both rich and poor. No one has the power to ransom their soul from the weight of their sin.

Why do riches count as nothing? **49:10-12**. You think you are safe because you have a good name? You come from a long line of Christians, maybe even a long line of preachers? Your name ends at your grave stone. You think your nice house will count for your eternal ransom? Like a sort of spiritual mortgage. Your grave is your home. Most of the nights your body will spend on this earth will not be on your pillow top bed, but six feet under in a cemetery.

The only good news about death to those who think that they can ransom themselves is that stupid people die too. That guy who doesn't know how to use the roundabout on Higgins, he too will die. So take heart. Man and his pomp will not remain. All the things that you can have confidence in, they are worth nothing in death. Like a beast you perish.

What does it mean when it says like a beast? **Ecc 3:18-21**. Men who boast in their pomp are like beasts because they have no mind for eternity. They really don't know what it takes to get anywhere and they are just hoping that they go up rather than down. Hoping that there is something more than dust waiting for them in the grave. Thoughtless and stupid beasts. That is the life of those who trust in earthly confidence.

This is their reality, this is the fruit of their labor: **49:13-14**.

Not only can do the foolish have false confidence in death. But for the most part, we approve of their foolish confidence. We subtly in our hearts long to have the confidence they have. We would never admit that we take confidence in wealth or riches or power...but subtly we approve of their boasts.

We strive for their riches, we lust for their power, we envy their stature. But they are like sheep lead to the grave. They are consumed in the grave, they grave is so powerfully overwhelming to these people that they don't even have a home in death. It is a life of endless death with no rest for the weary, no break for their folly, and no salvation from their iniquity.

Clearly the Psalmist had a thing for indie rock because at this point, there is not a lot of top-hit DJ's lining up to get this little ditty.

What we have learned so far is that death is a necessity to life, it happens to everyone. We have learned that nothing in this world, nothing that you can do will be able to pay off eternal damnation from the weight of your sins. And if you live like this you will spend eternity in eternal death, and that place is called hell. It is not a dirty word, it is a real word, and a real place. But it is always accompanied by a loving message.

We get that hope in **49:15**.

Now why? Why would God receive this man? Why would God ransom this individual? Well if we look back at this Psalm in the first few verses, we see that the Psalmist is standing among sinners much more powerful than him, surround by their iniquity and he doesn't sin. We don't hear about the iniquity of the Psalmist. If he has iniquity he should fear. His iniquity can't be paid for, the weight of his sin is too much.

He has confidence not because he finds poverty and humility to be a means of pious salvation, he has confidence because in the assembly of the sinners he cannot see his own sin.

Why? David address this in **Ps 32:1-2**. David speaks of a man whose transgression is forgiven, David speaks of a man who God sees no iniquity in.

This is a man who is truly ransomed. This is a man who has great confidence in death. But by what means? If he cannot ransom himself, who ransomed him. Even in David's Psalm his talk of forgiveness requires an additional party. I don't forgive myself. I don't need to forgive myself because myself loves myself and would never do anything against myself.

Forgiveness implies not only that there is another party, but that we have wronged the other party. That means that the forgiveness has to initiate from someone outside of us.

Where then is our confidence? Where then is our ransom? In the gospel of Matthew, there are two disciples who are living in this foolish confidence. So foolish that their mom came up to Jesus and said, "Of all your disciples, are not my two sons the most worthy to sit at your right and left hand. Haven't they done more for you in order to inherit a great position in the Kingdom of Heaven."

The conclusion of Jesus' answer was this: **Matt 20:28**. Your worth and your position don't matter. Your worth and your position will not even get you into heaven, rather you will have the ability to even see me in heaven because I have given myself as a ransom for many.

Jesus is our confidence in death.

I read a quote this week that said that the people who knock most boldly on the gates of heaven are the ones who are rejected by Christ as workers of iniquity. You see if it were up to our wealth and works we would knock boldly on heaven's door. We have ransomed ourselves, we have dug ourselves out of a pit, we deserve heaven. But those who recognize Christ's work as our ransom. Approach the gates of heaven in all humility, but in all confidence. We reach heaven in the humility that it was Christ's work that assured us, and confidence that Christ's works are enough for us.

Because of this reality the Psalmist continues: **Psalm 49:16-20**

For the foolish man, the glory of his house increases while he is on earth.

For the Christian our glory increases when we reach our house in heaven.

For the foolish man he carries nothing into death. For the one who God sees no iniquity, we carry everything into death, for we are led by Christ.

For the one who wins here on the earth, there is much more to be won in heaven.

For the foolish who dies in faithless ignorance like his fathers, for the wise we enter into the inheritance of the saints in light.

While the foolish see no light in death, the beloved see nothing but the light of Christ, for there will be no sun or light in heaven besides that of the beauty of the lamb who paid our ransom.

Man in his pomp without understanding is like the beasts of the fields.

Church we have the opportunity to be people with understanding. We have the opportunity on this side of death to respond to Christ's ransoming power on the cross.

To allow his purity to take our iniquity to have great confidence and great boasting in our death because we boast in Christ, his work, his death and his resurrection.

For the Psalmist, who lived hundreds of years before Christ, he lived in a hope that God would ransom his soul. For us, on this side of the cross we live in the reality that Christ has ransomed our souls. We should believe in that, and rejoice for we have nothing to fear in times of trouble. God has ransomed.

In closing, I just want to read the answer to the first question from the Heidelberg Catechism:

What is my only comfort in life and death?

That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me, that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He

also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready therefor to live unto Him.

Pray