

Money Can't but God Can

Introduction. Wisdom psalms reflect on wisdom, on the fate of the righteous and the wicked, and on the Law. Wisdom psalms often probe the inequities of life. Psalm 49 invites both rich and poor to hear something very important: Man who lives for all the pomp and glory this life offers dies like everyone else.

The language of the opening verses, the call to mankind, uses many of the terms which open the book of Proverbs, and proclaims this a wisdom psalm, offering instruction to men rather than worship to God.

Money can buy just about anything. It can buy a vehicle, a home, food, clothing, jewelry. But we also know that money can't buy some very important things like love, faithful friendships, and a faithful relationship with God.

I. Money Can't

A. Prevent death (Psalm 49:6-10a).

1. A careful study of life confirms the psalmist's conclusion that death is a leveler. All people die, whether wise or foolish. The "foolish and the senseless" have hoarded up wealth for themselves.
2. Perhaps there's nothing more physically secure than money and riches. And we all deeply understand this. But those who boast of their wealth have a false sense of security. Their wealth can't protect them from "the last enemy" — death (1 Corinthians 15:26).

B. Prevent distribution (Psalm 49:10b).

1. We came naked into the world, and so we will leave (Job 1:21, Ecclesiastes 5:15, 1 Timothy 6:7).
2. You leave it and you don't know who's going to receive it and what they'll do with it (Psalm 39:6; Ecclesiastes 2:18-21; Luke 12:21).

C. Prevent dishonor (Psalm 49:11-13).

1. Those who have made any attempt to perpetuate their own memory by naming property after themselves may only be remembered by the names engraved on their tombs.
2. Their end is in death, and they are forever cast out from their wealth and real properties (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11).

D. Prevent decomposition (Psalm 49:14).

1. Death is personified as a shepherd who leads the rich as sheep to the slaughter. This unusual poetic figure is similar to Jeremiah 9:21, where death climbs in at the windows to carry off the living. Now he's no intruder; he's on his home pastures.
2. Those who have cared for themselves in life will waste away in death. Rich and poor all become dust (Ecclesiastes 12:7).
3. But the righteous will be victorious. When their night of darkness is over, there will be "morning," and their lot will be changed.

II. God Can

- A. Provide hope (Psalm 49:15).
 - 1. The Lord will intervene on behalf of the godly and redeem them from the clutches of “death.” No money can buy these privileges (v. 7).
 - 2. The confidence of hope breaks through with the affirmation of the resurrection and of fellowship with God (John 6:40; 11:25; Acts 24:15; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:20-21).
- B. Provide help (Psalm 49:16-20).
 - 1. Don't be impressed and “overawed” (NIV) when you see others getting wealthy and buying bigger houses and cars. All their wealth will be left behind when they die and ultimately lose its value.
 - a) They won't be able to praise themselves, nor will they be able to hear others praise them. We take nothing with us when we die (Job 1:21; Ecclesiastes 5:14-15; 1 Timothy 6:7).
 - b) If we've been faithful stewards of what God has given us, we possess eternal riches that'll never fade (Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Peter 1:3-5). We can't take wealth with us, but we can send it ahead.
 - 2. So the call is to courage and clear-sighted faith; and the closing refrain drives home the lesson by a pointed change from its earlier form.
 - a) The purpose of the psalm was to instruct everyone, including the rich, in the path of wisdom.
 - b) The psalmist didn't intend to disparage the godly rich who received their wealth as a blessing from God (1 Timothy 6:17-19).
 - (1) The difference between human and animals lies in the degree of “understanding.”
 - (2) If one has no understanding of himself as a human being, of his mortality, and of God, he lives and dies “like the animals that perish.”

Conclusion. The theme of the futility of worldliness, summed up in the refrain, is close to that of Ecclesiastes. But it brings out into the open the assurance of victory over death which Ecclesiastes leaves concealed. True comfort doesn't exist in building our hopes on things temporal but on things eternal.