

Women in the Word  
Psalm 49, Rhonda Telfer  
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## **PSALM 49**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Thoughts on walking through a New England cemetery: our culture has moved from a biblical view of death. Yet the problem of death is inescapable.

Poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote “Ozymandias” in 1818 (the man-centered Romantic Period):

*I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains: round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Double use of “despair. Points to the “riddle” of Psalm 49: the weak despair at the power of the wealthy; the wealthy should despair at the power of the grave.

Christ alone “solves the riddle”

### **A UNIVERSAL CALL**

Psalmist says it 3 ways: “*all peoples*” “*all inhabitants of the world*” “*rich and poor.*””

The latter phrase points to the lesson of this wisdom psalm: wealth can't prevent death.

The fact that the call is going out shows God's mercy. A reminder of man's condition, and an offer of wisdom.

### **A UNIVERSAL DILEMMA**

Psalmist is going to expound on a “riddle” (a perplexity, a conundrum) that has occupied every man in every generation: the inevitability of death. He's setting his lesson to music.

Psalmist won't sweeten the truth in this song. Death means "*seeing the pit*" v9, "*perish*" v10, "*laid in the grave...Death shall feed on them...consumed in the grave*" v14 "*never see the light*" v19.

He ultimately wants to comfort the believer: "*Why should I fear...Do not be afraid*" (v 5, 16).

## THE RIDDLE

--Power and wealth are temporary and futile

-- Don't fear those "greedy graspers" (v5b, same Hebrew root as "Jacob" the heel-grabber ). They oppress you now, but their power won't last.

--Can't buy their way out of dying; they can't buy themselves more time (v7 'give to God a ransom')

--They think trusting in wealth (v6) will give them a "dwelling place for all generations." But the only permanent piece of land they will gain is their grave.

(Perhaps a play on Moses' words in **Psalm 90:1** "*Oh Lord, Thou has been our dwelling place through all generations.*")

--Despite visible glory, the unbelieving rich man is no more exalted than a "beast." (compare 16 to 20)

## JESUS ADDRESSES THE RIDDLE

Jesus "opened his mouth to speak wisdom" (like the Psalmist, v3). Asked to solve a fight over inheritance, he told a parable very much like Psalm 49:

*"He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully,<sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?'<sup>18</sup> And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.<sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'<sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

--Wealth isn't really the problem: arrogance and self-sufficiency keep men from God.

--The worldly man tries to "undo the curse" on his own: 1) get dominion over the earth through his own efforts, and 2) defy death

1) Adam lost dominion, had to "toil" against weeds for his wealth. Rich man boasts of his security, when his land "*produces plentifully*"

2) Adam would die (return to dust); rich thinks he can "relax" by amassing goods.

--Only one man can undo the curse: Jesus Christ.

## THE ANSWER: THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

**John 14:2-3** *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

The grave is not our last place. Jesus' "prepares a place" where he will receive us. (glimpsed in Psalm 49:15 "God will receive my soul from the power of Sheol; for He will receive me").

**Matt 19:23-26.** The dialogue sounds like Psalm 49 ("No man can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him, for the redemption of his soul is costly"):

Jesus: "It's hard for a rich man to get into heaven!"

Disciples: "Then no one can!"

Jesus: "With man, it's impossible, but with God, all is possible"

**I Peter 1:18-19.** "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold (human wealth!) from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood...the blood of Christ."

Jesus did what no man could do (Ps 49:7). He "redeemed his brother," giving "the ransom to God."

Our position will switch, from being ruled to ruling (Psalm 49:14 "the upright shall rule over them in the morning")

--**I Cor 15:55** The reign of death itself will be over! "Where oh Death is your victory?"

--**2 Cor 4:17** Our future glory will be beyond any current human glory. "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

--**2 Tim 2:12** "we shall also reign with Him."

## FOR DISCUSSION

Did you enjoy this psalm? Is it one you will return to for comfort? Recommend to others? Why or why not?

Is wealth bad? Discuss.

How do unbelievers console themselves in the face of death? How can we?

Exposition help from Peter Craigie, [Word Biblical Commentary](#), Derek Kidner, [Tyndale OT Commentaries](#), W. Van Gemeren, [Psalms](#). Poetry help from English class back in 1982. ☺