

CITY LIFE CHURCH
PSALM 49

Good morning, my name is John, I'm an elder here at City Life and I'll be bringing God's word for us this morning. If I have not met you before, please come introduce yourself, I'd love to talk to you after the service.

- One announcement before we begin, we have a Baptism service coming up soon and if you're interested or have questions about that come talk to me, Preston, or anyone down here after the service. Ok.
- Last summer me and my wife took our two children who were 7 and 5 at the time on a vacation to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. My wife is a beach person and I have been postponing this beach vacation for nine years and got to the point where I couldn't resist anymore and we went with my sister and her family who have two kids around the same ages as ours. In the end it was a great trip and my kids got their first experience in salt water so that was quite a life-changing experience for them. But there was one moment that I'll never forget from the trip on one of the mornings at the beach, it was pretty crowded. And I was doing the pretty typical parent protocol, multi-tasking, keeping an eye on the kids and doing whatever else is going on. So I'm sitting with my sister having some debate, probably about healthcare policy. My wife is out in the water with my brother-in-law bodyboarding (remember, she's the beach person) and I look up and I see one kid, OK 50%. But then I keep looking around and I don't see my daughter, Sophia. I asked my sister if she knew, I asked my son, and my nephews if they had seen her and no one knew where she was. So I am a parent here on the beach facing beach up and down as far as the eye can see, and outward an endless ocean... And I cannot find my daughter. She's missing. Now if you're a parent here you've had similar situations I'm sure you know this moment. But even if you're not a parent I know you've had this type of experience where in an instant, everything else in the world fades away. My restaurant preferences for lunch that day, whatever argument I was in with my sister, the book I was reading, worrying about getting sunburned, all of these other thoughts completely dissolved and I have a singular focus on what is actually most important in my life. In that moment of clarity the priorities of my life were evident - nothing else mattered than finding my daughter.
- In Psalm 49 we have a similar situation where the Psalmist faces some inescapable truths about life that give him this clarifying moment where everything else fades away.
 - o He looks at our mortality and death he is given godly wisdom and sees what is truly important in life and what is futile.
 - o Pray
 - o This morning we're going to look at 1) Need for Wisdom 2) How Human Wisdom Fails 3) Wisdom of a Ransomed People.

I.Need for wisdom

II. The audience for this Psalm is not just the psalmist himself or Israel, but he is instructing the whole world and call them to respond.

III. Look at verses 1-2

- o “Hear this, all peoples!
Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
² both low and high,
rich and poor together!”
- o He opens with this universal call to all humankind.
- o He names “low and high, rich and poor” to show that the need for God’s wisdom transcends any petty distinctions we would make amongst ourselves.
- o So, whether you’re a Christian, seeking, or skeptical this morning, this Psalm is written to you.
- o In verse 3 he writes,
 - o “³ My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.
⁴ I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.”
- o This is a Psalm of Wisdom, and he says he will speak wisdom, which may be an odd notion.
- o Three things about Wisdom:
 - o First, we see in the Bible that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10).”
 - ♣ This means that wisdom is thinking with reverence and respect to the Lord like a child who is in awe of his father trying to remember what he has been taught.
 - o Secondly, wisdom occurs through “the meditation of my heart.” So, to properly begin wisdom, we have to slow down and deliberately take time where we are sitting to examine our heart and be open to experiencing the depths of God’s truth.
 - o Third quality about Biblical wisdom is that its practical.
 - ♣ When we hear talk about wisdom we may think it is some theoretical abstract musings. No, look at verse 5.
- ♣ The Psalmist says in verse 5 that he will use wisdom to solve his problems and then asks why should he fear his enemies.
 - o See, wisdom deals with tangible issues, has to do with real life circumstances (enemies, reputation, finances).
 - o See, the Lord designed us, he’s our creator, he knows what leads to flourishing and happiness better than we do. So, to fear God, to live our lives under him we should listening to what he says will fulfill us, satisfy us, cause us to flourish where we are.
 - ♣ And this is what Wisdom literature in the Bible is trying to show us, how to practically walk in a manner pleasing to God that causes our happiness and to avoid a life that God knows is destructive and leads to sin, pain, and captivity.
 - o So here the questions is “Why should I fear in times of trouble..?”

- o That's a practical, concrete, daily life kind of question.
- o We have a great need for God's wisdom. Questions about callings, vocations, whether we're working too hard, or not enough, is wrong to strive for a good reputation. How do I know its okay to rest? All these daily questions are answered based on our real beliefs.
- o God, our creator and heavenly father has something to say about the practical struggles and hard circumstances in your life.
 - o Do you believe that? This morning do you feel your need for God's wisdom?
 - o Do you feel autonomous and independent? Like you can solve all the problems life brings you?
- o Often we have misplaced confidence in man's wisdom.

Failure of the World's Wisdom

Next, Psalm 49 shows us an alternative to God's wisdom, we see one example of how man attempts to answer life's problems on his own.

The Psalmist looks to the rich and powerful of his day and sees their guiding principle in life is their wealth, their social status, and reputation.

Look:

- o Verse 6 says they, "trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches"

- o Verse 11 points out "They call lands by their own names"

- o Then they are described as living in "Pomp" and "foolish confidence" (12,

13)

•When we hear this description, we easily point outward to someone more successful than us, 'they're the ones who trust their wealth,' but remember, let's meditate and look at our own hearts this morning.

We also are guilty of trusting our wealth, or maybe hoping in wealth we don't have.

Are you spending money outside your budget to win someone's approval? Do you fear whether you've made the right life choices to lead you where you are financially? Maybe you fear not being able to afford the right education for your children.

These fears capture us, we become slave of this fake wisdom that tells us to trust our wealth to save us, to protect us/our family, and to bring us happiness. Do you need to repent of trusting or hoping in wealth is morning?

I confess when a time of trouble hits I'm too quick to turn to our bank account to at least take solace in that.

- o When your job situation is rocky or there's drama at the office, do you look to your savings and think "Its ok, my money will save me if everything goes south and I'm looking for a new job."

1 Timothy 6:10 tells us "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith..."

Church, the problem is not just that God tells us to trust him more than money, but that the financial stability, title, or reputation is utterly insufficient to bring me happiness, they cannot satisfy us in life because they actually tempt me to wander away from God.

o Then the Psalmist's next point is that trust in money or any other human wisdom cannot save us from the stark reality of death. Our culture partially acknowledges death. You all know the saying "nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." We have whole industries dedicated to preventing death, preparation, and caring for those bereaving our deaths. There is a peer-reviewed journal called *Death Studies*. Death has fascinated artists from Homer to Shakespeare to today in our art, literature, music, movies, and TV. But with all of this do we individuals really face the idea and reality of death and our mortality?

o The Psalmist is trying to make us take an honest look at death here.

o First, the Psalmist imagines death as one capturing men here, and no riches can buy you back.

o Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me,

⁶ those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches?

o⁷ Truly no man can ransom another,
or give to God the price of his life,

⁸ for the ransom of their life is costly
and can never suffice,

⁹ that he should live on forever
and never see the pit.

o No one can buy their way out of death. No letters of recommendation or amount of endorsements on LinkedIn will help.

o The philosopher Shelly Kagan says "the badness of death is the deprivation of future opportunities to enjoy or chase after the good things life offers."

o This is why humans, when really looking at it, naturally fear death. After we die there is no improvement. No more opportunity to achieve that goal, impress my peers, get that dream job, make a noticeable difference in the world. Death takes away hope in the future.

o Wealth is the opposite, wealth promises me opportunity to impress my friends, to make a difference in the world, to achieve that perfect Instagram life.

o But money is no match for death...

o The Psalmist continues,

o¹⁰ For he sees that even the wise die;
the fool and the stupid alike must perish
and leave their wealth to others.

¹¹ Their graves are their homes forever,^[a]
their dwelling places to all generations,
though they called lands by their own names.

12 Man in his pomp will not remain;
he is like the beasts that perish.

o¹³ This is the path of those who have foolish confidence;
yet after them people approve of their boasts.^[b] *Selah*

14 Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
death shall be their shepherd,
and the upright shall rule over them in the morning.

Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell.

o Here the psalmist faces an inescapable reality: all humans die.

o Rich, poor, wise, foolish and their wealth which they clung tightly to slips through their mortal fingers and rolls to another.

o No matter your socio-economic status we “are like the beasts that perish”

o Ouch. We have merciless clarity here about humanity’s mortal condition.

o Death is the great equalizer between the wealthy and the poor.

o Remember verse 1, the “low and high, the poor and wealth” all need true wisdom of God.

o Some waste their lives to get ahead of that mortgage payment or to be able to put a down payment on a house, but it is temporary for their permanent home is the grave forever.

o They named lands after themselves to show prosperity and sovereignty over something, yet they perish in the ground.

o The Psalmist is digging deep poetically to help you really face and feel the terrorizing reality of death.

o Not going to pan the shot, not going to fade out, going to keep the lens focused on this painful, fearful, haunting truth that we’re going to die!

o Verse 14 - Death is a shepherd leading them, ensuring they end at their designated destination.

♣ Powerful illustrations and sobering imagery,

♣ Haunting nature of death is not something realized just by those who believe in God.

o Albert Camus, the philosopher and novelist, wrote “There will be no lasting peace either in the heart of individuals or in social customs until death is outlawed.”

o The Psalmist point is that the height of human wisdom is no match for death.

o In my field of work we have obvious reverence for what we consider the highest form of human wisdom: The Supreme Court of the United States.

o Working in public policy and politics, you may think you have a good policy idea, you may even convince an entire State Legislature and the Governor your idea is constitutional, but none of that really matters if the Supreme Court does not approve of your legislation.

o They are the pinnacle of human wisdom in my field. A few years ago a piece of legislation I worked on went before the Supreme Court and I think its one of the closest thing we have in America to a “holy space.” You have to wait in line for hours before being ushered in to the chamber and although there

- were hundreds of us in there, it was completely silent. People quietly walking in and sitting down, waiting for the impeccable wisdom from these nine justices to be shared. Utter reverence, fear even. Historically the founding fathers actually called the Supreme Court the temple of justice. Pretty blatant huh?
- o But there came the justices walking in, in their regal robes taking their perched positions at the dais to decree their wisdom about whether a particular law was constitutional or not.
 - o But even in that pomp and circumstance, death was supreme. See, only eight justices walked in to take a seat. One of the chairs was covered in a black cloak to represent that just months before the trial, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia had passed away in his sleep.
 - o The height of human wisdom, we're petition them to settle this dispute, and we're reminded even these justices are mortal. They are subject to death.
 - o How do you think of death?
 - o Ignore death – like those described here, go on with your job, relationships, search for happiness just acting like your immortal.
 - o Fear death – obsess over physical health and wellness, crippled seeking out safety and avoiding risks at all costs, anxious for your self and others
 - o Maybe you need to spend some time in this Psalm thinking of death to come to this moment of clarity the Psalmist does.
 - o Now, praise the Lord we are not left to face death with our own petty human wisdom.
 - o Look at verse 15.

IIIa. Wisdom of a Ransomed People

- o Verse 15. “But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.”
- o This point here is a great history-shaping phrase. This words “But God” in v15 is one of the mountain-tops of Old Testament hope.
 - o This is like going to the top of a skyscraper, to see the whole city which you've barely explored. It's a breath-taking truth.
- o See, Sheol is a Hebrew word for the underworld, hell, or death itself
- o And so, this Psalm is not just practicing existential angst or wallowing about how death is inescapable, but he proclaims to the world that those who seek God have victory over death and its consequences.
 - o If you believe in the Lord, if you repent and seek Christ, you have assurance you've been rescued from death.
- o So here, we see a comparison between those living in human wisdom captive to seeking wealth and status and those seeking the Lord; those that store up riches on earth and those who have been given life in an eternal kingdom.
 - o The difference has nothing to do with the individual's accomplishment.
 - o See, instead of demanding that we pay ransom as in verse 7, God himself pays for our ransom from Sheol where we, as sinners, rightfully belong.

- This is not some impersonal transaction, “for he will receive me” this is intimate.
 - ♣ Salvation is not at arm’s length, but face to face.
- Once we are rescued we are brought into the family of God.
- Romans 8 explains “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15](#)For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!””
- This is heart of the gospel, that we sin against our own holy creator, but instead of punishing us, he sent his son to die on the cross in our place. And now he gives faith to believe in him and to be received by God.
- So rich men cannot ransom for their own life, for its too costly. But God ransomed us from being captured by our sin and spiritual death.
 - Think of Liam Neeson in *Taken*, busting down doors and overcoming enemies to rescue his kidnapped child.
 - The difference is we bought our way into captivity and we desire to be there. We often resist rescue. We want to stay obsessing over our jobs, bank accounts, reputation. We ignore the call of God to turn to better things in him. We’re foolish, but God is relentless. So he comes to get us while we’re kicking and screaming. His rescue cannot be thwarted.
 - Do you hear the call of the Lord this morning? Has the Lord put something on your mind that you’re resisting or at least trying to ignore? Don't leave without talking about that. We’d love to hear your thoughts, your heart, and pray with and for you. We want to help you process the call of the Lord.
- Back to the beach and my missing daughter, I walking up the beach and I walked down the beach. Now my wife and Brother-in-law were in the search. And it felt like an eternity. Finally, we walked over to lifeguard and began to explain to him and immediately he said into his walkie-talkie “**we found the parents.**” He walked us over to a Sherriff’s truck and when my wife walked around the back of the truck, there she was. Sophia got out of the truck and ran into my wife’s arms and started crying. They were both crying, I just had some sand in my eyes. Now although this whole episode lasted less than 15 minutes it was the longest period of my life. Immediately, after that experience I couldn't just go back to making dinner plans, or discuss what movie we were going to see that night, even my debates about justice and public health, as important as they are just seemed pedantic. I had a brief time where priorities in life with made extremely clear there was no question about whether what was most important to me and it revealed itself it came to the surface that I was completely undone if I would’ve lost one of my children.
- This is what death and God’s rescue should do for us.

- We need not ignore or fear death, but we need to look deep into the chasm of darkness to truly realize the value of God's rescuing us from the penalty of our sin.
- And in Christ, we have a firm hope there is someone searching for us, in our lostness, confusion, and lack of wisdom. We are part of his family remember? And he finds us like lost children.
- Now, to be clear, Christians still do physically die.
 - "Death is the final outcome of living in a fallen world."
- The Bible explains that the last aspect of the fallen world to be removed will be physical death.
- The Apostle Paul writes that when Christ returns, "then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."
⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?
 O death, where is your sting?"
- So until our physical deaths, and our full reconciliation with the Lord, we are left here to Fear the Lord, and walk in his Wisdom.

IIIb. Walking in Wisdom:

- That's exactly where the Psalm ends.
- The psalmist returns to that practical question in verse five about fear and answers:
 - ¹⁶ Be not afraid when a man becomes rich,
 when the glory of his house increases.
¹⁷ For when he dies he will carry nothing away;
 his glory will not go down after him.
¹⁸ For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed
 —and though you get praise when you do well for yourself—
¹⁹ his soul will go to the generation of his fathers,
 who will never again see light.
²⁰ Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that
 perish.
- Though we've been rescued and our salvation has been secured we are still called to strive to walk in wisdom, in understanding.
- The Bible is full of wisdom, advice, and God-enlightened practical problem solving.
- **God's Wisdom extinguishes misplaced fears.**
 - **We need to take advantage of this wisdom (hold Bible)**
- Are we applying wisdom to the next season of life? Will we leave summer and enter the busyness of the Fall with the main aim of securing things that money can buy (comfort, security, provision) or what only the gospel can buy (life, redemption, forgiveness, etc).

- These are the types of questions we need to ask and be reminded of God's wisdom, his Gospel rescue, and what he tells us will lead to flourishing and not captivity to sin. How easily we forget.
- After Sophia's episode at the beach the life guard gave her a bright yellow rubber bracelet. She loved it, it said something like always swim near a lifeguard or something, but it essentially was just an advertisement "Ask me about how my parents lost me at the beach." Some of you knew this story about our beach trip because my daughter was just too happy to tell you the whole story once you complimented her bright yellow bracelet. It's a reminder of that moment. We need reminders of true wisdom.
- And that's one of the reasons the church is here.
 - We're here to remind you that the most important thing about you is that you've been rescued by a good and wise father.
 - We're here to help each other turn away from misplaced fears
 - We're here to warn each other that love of money, blindly chasing success and reputation leads to captivity and death.
- Church, above all let's be faithful to remind each other, "Jesus Christ has ransomed those that cry out to him from the captivity of our sin and freed us from death."
- Let's Pray