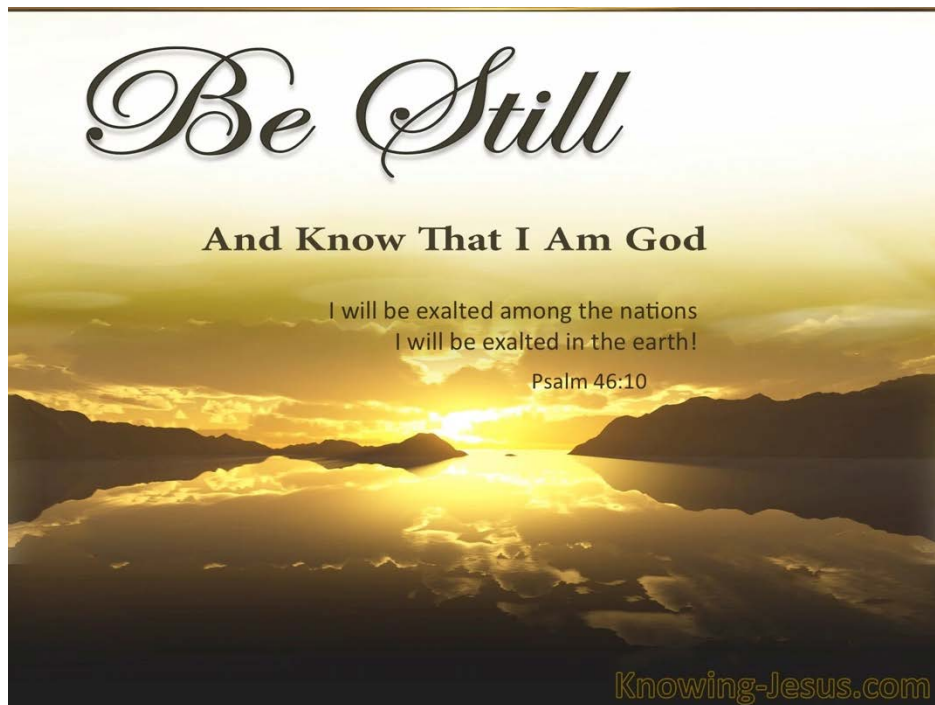


PSALMS OF THE SONS OF KORAH
ANTIDOTE TO VANITY AND DEATH
PSALM 49



T. M. and Susie Moore

A Scriptorium Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Psalms of the Sons of Korah: Antidote to Vanity and Death

Psalm 49

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Introduction to Psalm 49

People in every generation and culture are seeking some way to redeem themselves – that is, to ensure maximum happiness and prestige, regardless of their station in life. Everyone wants to be happy, and everyone would like to be received by others as worthy of attention, or perhaps admiration, if not adulation.

But this is mere vanity. We all die. Our wealth is squandered, and our fame is fleeting. Who remembers us after we're gone for more than a generation or so? Is there any cure to such vanity and death?

It might interest the people of our world to know that God Himself stands ready to redeem and receive them, so that they don't have to die like mere beasts. Our duty is to help them understand this, so that the light of Jesus can shine into their soul.

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May the Lord bless your work in this study, that you may grow to know Him better, love Him more, and serve Him more joyfully.

T. M. and Susie Moore

1 A Song for the Nations

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.3, 4, 15

My mouth shall speak wisdom,
And the meditation of my heart shall give understanding.
I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will disclose my dark saying on the harp...
But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,
For He shall receive me.

Selah

Sing Psalm 49.1-6, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Hear this, you peoples, low and high; give ear as wisdom I proclaim:
My heart with understanding fills to hear and sing my Savior's fame.
Why should I fear when foes arise, who trust in wealth and boast in lies?

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49, meditate on verses 3 and 4

Preparation

1. What is the primary message of this psalm?
2. To whom is this psalm directed?

Meditation

The superscription tells us that this was a psalm (song) written by the sons of Korah and delivered to the chief musician. It was thus intended for use in public worship. Asaph, the other musicians, and the sons of Korah were appointed to prophesy with instruments and song (1 Chron. 25.1-8). This suggests a role for music and singing in worship that we perhaps take for granted these days – that singing can be a form of proclamation.

Singing songs like Psalm 49, perhaps.

What strikes us immediately about this psalm is that it was directed to the people and inhabitants of the world (v. 1). In the days of the sons of Korah, when Solomon was king, the streets of Jerusalem would have abounded with foreign visitors, some of whom may even have found their way to the outskirts of the temple. These people came bearing tribute and to learn from Solomon's wisdom (cf. 1 Kgs. 10). The sons of Korah gave them a song to contemplate during their long journey home.

The psalm offers wisdom and understanding to any who will receive it (v. 3). Though it may sound like a proverb, consisting of sayings difficult to understand (v. 4), those who attend to it thoughtfully could expect to benefit from it eternally.

These days we don't think much about writing poems or songs for unbelievers to read and consider. But Psalm 49 suggests we may be missing an important aspect of our witness to the world. If God thought singing and reciting verse to unbelieving ears might bring them to wisdom and understanding, perhaps we, too, should reconsider our own use of these powerful resources.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

There is a song for the nations, and we are called to sing it.

Sometimes we are even called to write it.

But regardless of how this song gets sung or written, it is our job to do it with the skills freely given us by the Holy Spirit.

It matters not whether the song is a solo, duet, trio, or choir production.

What matters is that we sing it to the world that is lost without God.

Rehearsals involve mediating in God's word which gives us understanding.

Understanding proverbs allows us to help others understand "perplexing problems" (Ps. 49.4 TLB).

With this wisdom we proclaim Jesus, and in so doing, please the Lord.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19.14).

Songs are a memorable way to proclaim the truth.

As we know, opposing choirs use this means all the time to broadcast contrary ways.

So let's sing out a "new song" ...with a "shout of joy" (Ps. 33.3).

"He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God;

many will see *it* and fear, and will trust in the LORD" (Ps. 40.3).

We have the confidence to go forth with this because "His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life" (Ps. 42.8).

Truly the song the nations need to hear is about the King, the Savior, the Almighty God, the Prince of Peace.

Here is a sample song written by the saints, which God heard as their prayer:

"And they sang a new song, saying:

'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals;

for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood

out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...'" (Rev. 5.9).

We are free to use any of the themes of Scripture as lyrics to our new tunes.

We just need to get busy and do it!

The Song for the Nations is about redemption and love.

Let's sing!

Reflection

1. Obviously, Scripture has a lot to say about singing. Why do you think that is so?

2. How would you summarize the Song for the Nations we have been called to sing? Can you think of a hymn or two that embodies that Song?

3. Try learning a hymn that speaks to our unbelieving age. How might you use this as part of your witness in your Personal Mission Field?

This psalm is quite different from a psalm of praise; it is an instruction text set to music. Its structure is: (1) a call for understanding (vv. 1–4); (2) a declaration of the vanity of trusting in wealth (vv. 5–9); (3) a declaration of the worthlessness of possessions after death (vv. 10–12); (4) a description of God's redemption (vv. 13–15); (5) the conclusion that there is no need to fear the rich (vv. 16–20). Earl Radmacher (1931–2014), NKJV Study Bible Notes on Psalm 49

Antidote to Vanity and Death: Psalm 49

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.15-20

Thank God for saving you through faith in Jesus Christ. Pray for the lost people you know, and for an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus today.

Sing Psalm 49.16-20 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Let the redeemed of God take heart, though fools and all their wealth increase.

Death shall deprive him of all he owns, the grave shall make his glory cease.

Thus though he boasts, no light he sees; his end in hell shall ever be.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!

His grace and mercy let me tell!

2 Fear Not

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.16-20

Do not be afraid when one becomes rich,
When the glory of his house is increased;
For when he dies he shall carry nothing away;
His glory shall not descend after him.
Though while he lives he blesses himself
(For *men* will praise you when you do well for yourself),
He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
They shall never see light.
A man who is in honor, yet does not understand,
Is like the beasts *that* perish.

Sing Psalm 49.16-20, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Let the redeemed of God take heart, though fools and all their wealth increase.
Death shall deprive him of all he owns, the grave shall make his glory cease.
Thus though he boasts, no light he sees; his end in hell shall ever be.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49.5-9

Preparation

1. Whom did the sons of Korah not fear? Why not?
2. Can trusting in wealth and riches redeem someone?

Meditation

The fear of man, wrote Solomon, “brings a snare” (Prov. 29.25). Peter learned that lesson the hard way. Given the opportunity to identify himself as a follower of Christ, Peter denied the Lord three times before a young girl and some strangers. Jesus said we must not fear people or what they might do to us; we should instead fear God (Matt. 10.28).

The sons of Korah must have been tempted to fear the wealthy Gentiles who visited their city from time to time. If these people were so rich, how prosperous and powerful must their country be? But when they considered fearing men, they refused to do so (vv. 5, 16). They knew power greater than even the most powerful empires on earth.

God has the power to redeem – to save and forgive and convey into a new Kingdom of light and life. No amount of wealth or temporal power can accomplish that (vv. 6-9). Unbelieving people suppose that riches can bring them whatever “redemption” they might require – happiness, friends, security, and so forth. But these are not true redemption; they cannot deliver us from the grave, and they will not provide entrance into eternal life (v. 9).

The redeemed of the Lord have been ransomed by the death of God’s own Son. All the riches of Jesus are ours, as we worship and obey Him in our daily lives. And the people of this world cannot take these away from us, even though they may take away our freedoms or our lives. So why should we fear them?

We should not.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Job, who had just lost most of his family and possessions, was spoken to by Elihu, who asked: “Will your riches, or all the mighty forces, keep you from distress?” (Job 36.19)

Not very comforting, albeit, but true nonetheless, because the answer was “no”.

So if riches are not the answer, what is?

If riches can't buy peace with God, what can?

When sin is nipping at our heels, is there a ready escape for that?

Is there a remedy for hopelessness that we can buy?

Again, no, there is not.

But Jesus was willing to buy the perfect gift just for us, however, at a great cost to Himself.

He was willing to spend and be spent for us (2 Cor. 12.15).

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Gal. 1.3-5).

“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,

He was bruised for our iniquities;

the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,

and by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned, every one, to his own way;

and the LORD has laid on Him

the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53.4-6).

Beautiful, majestic Savior, Jesus bought us the perfect gift with afflictions, wounds, bruises, chastisements, and stripes.

“For the redemption of their souls was costly...” (Ps. 49.8).

Reflection

1. Why do people continue to think that wealth, riches, and favorable circumstances are the essence of happiness?
2. What is our message to a world which continues to be confused about where happiness is to be found?
3. How can we keep fear of man from hindering our witness for our beautiful, majestic Savior?

Some people rely on their friends, others on their own strength, others on riches. These things are the presumptuous reliance of a human race that does not rely on God. Augustine (354-430), Expositions of Psalms 49.7-8

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.1-6

Wait in silence on the Lord. Ask Him to show you if there is any fear of man in you, keeping you from living as a witness for the Lord. Seek His strength and help to overcome your fear with boldness.

Sing Psalm 49.1-6, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Hear this, you peoples, low and high; give ear as wisdom I proclaim:

Antidote to Vanity and Death: Psalm 49

My heart with understanding fills to hear and sing my Savior's fame.
Why should I fear when foes arise, who trust in wealth and boast in lies?

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

3 The Way of the Foolish

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.10-12

For he sees wise men die;
Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish,
And leave their wealth to others.
Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever,
Their dwelling places to all generations;
They call their lands after their own names.
Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain;
He is like the beasts that perish.

Sing Psalm 49.10-12, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

See how the wise and senseless die, and leave to others all their gold.
Vainly forever they longed and hoped to have their names and glories told.
Man in his pomp will not endure; like any beast his end is sure.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49.10-13

Preparation

1. What do fools know about life?
2. What do they do to try to overcome that fate?

Meditation

“The wisdom of the prudent,” Solomon wrote, “is to understand his way.” On the other hand, “the folly of fools *is* deceit” (Prov. 14.8). Self-deception is a terrible way to live. It gives false hope without resolving underlying fears. The pagans whom the sons of Korah observed in Jerusalem knew full well that everybody dies – wise men and senseless people alike (v. 10). But they thought they could live on after death somehow through the monuments they erected for themselves, whether houses or lands or businesses or trust funds or stadiums bearing their names or whatever (v. 11).

Thus deceived, they strutted their pomp around the streets of Jerusalem, believing that by fleeting, finite means they could assure immortality for themselves. And then they died (v. 12). Just like beasts, having accomplished nothing of any lasting value. Who remembers the names of any of them today?

But they taught their children well (v. 13), because their children followed in the footsteps of their departed forebears, chasing vain dreams of happiness and immortality through material gain and personal prowess. Deceit, it seems, like bad genes, can be passed from one generation to another.

The lesson of history, Friedrich Hegel wrote, is that nobody ever learns anything from history. Knowing we all must die, people continue to seek happiness in material comforts, with but little regard for their neighbor or his needs. Having made happiness their god, they are destined for disappointment when they face the one true God Who blessed them so abundantly, but without any thanks in return. Will He receive them? He will not.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

God, in His gentleness and kindness, spoke about us, even in our foolishness, as those with honor (v. 12).

Antidote to Vanity and Death: Psalm 49

The sons of Korah were observing and writing about those behaving like brute beasts; and yet, God saw them with eyes of love and hope.

Solomon wrote about those in his kingdom who were behaving foolishly. He pointed out that “The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the LORD” (Prov. 19.3).

How like those folks we are. We do things contrary to God’s Law, and our minds, hearts, and lives get twisted all in a bunch. Everything is a mess. And what do we do? We rail against God. We fret. We blame.

But God expects a different approach from us. He expects the best of us. He has made us in His image (Gen. 1.26). He thinks of us as honorable.

But people. We tend to see ourselves and each other in a more beastly fashion:

“...he is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49.12).

“I *was* so foolish and ignorant; I was *like* a beast before You” (Ps. 73.22).

“But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 1.10).

But we are not beasts. We are God’s image-bearers. He chose us to belong to Him. He loves us (Jn. 15.16). He demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still beastly sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5.8).

So let’s not live like the foolish, with twisted ways and beastly hearts. Let us live as God sees us. His children. “Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2. 11,12).

This is the way of the wise.

Reflection

1. Is it a good idea for people to think of themselves as merely some form of higher animal? Explain.
2. What’s wrong with believing that our best happiness will be found in things and comforts?
3. What are some ways we as Christians deceive ourselves about what God expects from and wants for us?

This likewise shows the folly of worldly people, who sell their souls for that which will never buy them. With all their wealth they cannot secure themselves from the stroke of death. Yet one generation after another applaud their maxims; and the character of a fool, as drawn by heavenly Wisdom itself, Luke 12:16-21, continues to be followed even among professed Christians. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on the Psalm 49.6-14

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.13-15

Pray for the lost people in your Personal Mission Field, that God will open their eyes to the futility of trying to live without Him.

Sing Psalm 49.13-15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Thus go the foolish on their way, and all who approve their deceitful words.

Meekly like sheep to death they go, and meet destruction afterwards.

See how the righteous overrules the fleeting forms of dying fools!

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!

His grace and mercy let me tell!

4 Redeemed!

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.13-15

This is the way of those who are foolish,
And of their posterity who approve their sayings.

Selah

Like sheep they are laid in the grave;
Death shall feed on them;
The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;
And their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling.
But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,
For He shall receive me.

Selah

Sing Psalm 49.13-15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Thus go the foolish on their way, and all who approve their deceitful words.
Meekly like sheep to death they go, and meet destruction afterwards.
See how the righteous overrules the fleeting forms of dying fools!

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49.13-15

Preparation

1. What happens to those who choose to live as fools?
2. What awaits those who have been redeemed?

Meditation

Those who choose to live like beasts will die like beasts, their souls failing to realize the happiness they sought by all their self-serving means. “Death shall feed on them” and that forever and ever, denying them any hope of true life and joy in the salvation only God can give (v. 14). They refused to know Him or to give Him thanks for His many good gifts; thus, they consigned themselves to a life of increasing separation from God, ending in eternal death, as Paul explained (Rom. 1.18-32). When the new day of eternal life dawns, and the Daystar descends in judgment, those who are with Him in uprightness will rule over the wicked, who will see the ugliness of their ways and be cast into a dwelling of everlasting fire (v. 14, cf. Rev. 19).

We dare not gloat about this. God is our Redeemer, but not because of anything we have done (v. 15). He receives us because of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose death on the cross is sufficient to pay for the sins of every human being. The grave has no hold on us who have been redeemed. The eternal dwelling of fire awaits us not; rather, we look for a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells.

Eternal joy, eternal despair. We know the difference, and we know the way to that dwelling place that satisfies all our longings for happiness. Should we not, like the sons of Korah, make every effort to tell the people in our world about the wages of sin, the hope of redemption, and the promise of eternal life?

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Those who choose to live like beasts will die like beasts...”

But here is the amazing thing: God created beasts (real beasts Gen. 1.24, 25), and He has power over them and over those of us who behave like them.

He also created us in His image (Gen. 1.26, 27). And then He said that we would have dominion over “every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1.28). God created us for success over the beasts and over ourselves. The opposite of this is: “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls” (Prov. 25.28).

Our Redeemer Jesus has rule over the beasts and over us. In Mark 11.2 Jesus told His disciples to “Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat.” I am not an equine specialist, but my thought is that the animal is big, and it is wild. No one has sat upon it before, and now Jesus plans to ride it. Jesus could’ve sent the disciples into the village to a stable to hire a tame animal for transport. But He didn’t. He wanted them and us to see that He is Lord of all creatures – big, wild, untamed, or tame. And humans, as well. And when the Lord has need of something, or someone, we best do His bidding.

“And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19.9, 10). And now that we are redeemed and found, we have a purpose to fulfill. And here it is: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2.11-14).

Redeemed beasts. He shall receive us! (Ps. 49.15)

Reflection

1. How is it evident that many people today deny the existence of the soul and insist that people are merely a higher form of animal? Why do they do this? What is the effect of this?
2. Can we realize our true purpose and greatest happiness in life by living as mere beasts? Why not?
3. What does it mean to you to be created in God’s image and redeemed in Jesus for the renewing of that image in you (2 Cor. 3.12-18)?

We must not overlook, (what I have already noticed,) that the sure method of profiting by the divine promises is, to apply to ourselves what God has offered generally to all without exception. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Psalm 49.15*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.15-20

Spend an extended season of prayer, praising and thanking God for your redemption, and looking forward to His return to take you to be with Him forever. Then pray for the lost people in your Personal Mission Field, and for an opportunity to share Jesus today.

Sing Psalm 49.16-20 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Let the redeemed of God take heart, though fools and all their wealth increase.

Death shall deprive him of all he owns, the grave shall make his glory cease.

Thus though he boasts, no light he sees; his end in hell shall ever be.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!

His grace and mercy let me tell!

5 Nothing to Fear

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.5, 6, 16, 17

Why should I fear in the days of evil,
When the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?
Those who trust in their wealth
And boast in the multitude of their riches...
Do not be afraid when one becomes rich,
When the glory of his house is increased;
For when he dies he shall carry nothing away;
His glory shall not descend after him.

Sing Psalm 49.16-20 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Let the redeemed of God take heart, though fools and all their wealth increase.
Death shall deprive him of all he owns, the grave shall make his glory cease.
Thus though he boasts, no light he sees; his end in hell shall ever be.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49.16, 17

Preparation

1. Of what should believers not be afraid?
2. What happens to the “glory” of unbelievers?

Meditation

Wait. Why would anyone become afraid just because someone else becomes rich? Two reasons.

First, we might fear that we are missing out on something, some boon or bounty that we might enjoy, if only we were rich. The fear here is that we might not know as much happiness as the rich person because we do not possess the *means* for happiness which we suppose the rich to have achieved.

Second, we might think that rich people have influence, and they might be inclined to use their influence against us, probably to their advantage and not ours. The fear here is that we can do nothing to oppose the plans of the rich and powerful, and that may not always work out well for us.

So what can we do?

Don't be afraid (cf. v. 5). Can the wealthy know greater happiness than the humblest person who is redeemed and received by God? Not by a long shot. Does the wealthy person have power to wield over us that can thwart the power of God to redeem and receive us? Nope.

It's a question of where you're looking. If your vision of life is merely “under the sun” – things and comforts and agreeable circumstances – then you're likely to be afraid of many things. If your vision is “under the heavens” on the other hand – focused on Christ, exalted in glory and returning to receive you unto Himself forever – then you won't be afraid of anything.

You'll just continue looking to Jesus and do your duty of living and proclaiming His redemption. Just like the sons of Korah.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Do not be afraid...” (Ps. 49. 16).

Before we discuss all the things that we are not supposed to be afraid of, let’s look at some things that we are to fear. These things have mainly to do with falling into the displeasure of God; not man.

The first instance arises in the garden of Eden early in the history of man: “...she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid...’” (Gen. 2.6, 8-10). And they should have been afraid.

The second construct of fear Jesus relates to us: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10.28).

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

“For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 10.31; 12.29).

Now we can read about all the ways that we are not to be afraid!

God spoke to Abram (even before He renamed him Abraham) in a vision, saying: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward” (Gen. 15.1).

God said to the children of Israel soon after He brought them out of Egypt that if they obeyed Him: “I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid...” (Lev. 26.6).

David affirmed this truth in a poem and said: “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Ps. 4.8).

Solomon added: “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid...” (Prov. 3.24, 25). The disciples were terrified, thinking they had seen a ghost. “And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid’” (Matt. 14.26, 27).

In summary: we should fear disobeying and displeasing God.

But we are not to fear rich people, moving, change, stepping out in faith, man, or ghosts.

Fear not! But even if we do become afraid, He is still with us:

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (Ps. 56.3, 4)

Reflection

1. What does it mean to fear God? Why is this so important?
2. What happens when people fear men rather than God?
3. The fear of God leads to obeying Him, which leads to loving Him (Deut. 10.12, 13). Explain.

The sum of the whole matter is, that it can profit a man nothing to gain the whole world, to become possessed of all its wealth and all its power, if he lose his own soul, and is cast away for want of that holy and heavenly wisdom which distinguishes man from the brutes, in his life and at his death. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 49.15-20

Antidote to Vanity and Death: Psalm 49

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.1-9, 15

Pray that God will give you courage for this day, to face any challenge, endure any trial, and undertake any calling or direction from the Lord. Praise Him for redeeming and saving you, and for sending you as His ambassador to your world.

Sing Psalm 49.1-9, 15

(Sagina: [And Can It Be, That I Should Gain](#))

Hear this, you peoples, low and high; give ear as wisdom I proclaim:
My heart with understanding fills to hear and sing my Savior's fame.
Why should I fear when foes arise, who trust in wealth and boast in lies?

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

No man his brother can redeem, or give a ransom for his soul.
Let him leave off the vain attempt to gather redemption's priceless toll.
Vainly he longs for eternal day, that he may not endure decay.

Refrain, v. 15

6 Honor and Praise

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.7-9

None *of them* can by any means redeem *his* brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him—
For the redemption of their souls *is* costly,
And it shall cease forever—
That he should continue to live eternally,
And not see the Pit.

Sing Psalm 49.7-9, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

No man his brother can redeem, or give a ransom for his soul.
Let him leave off the vain attempt to gather redemption's priceless toll.
Vainly he longs for eternal day, that he may not endure decay.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49.18-20

Preparation

1. Why should anyone receive praise?
2. What is more important than being honored and praised?

Meditation

In this life – life “under the sun” – the most anyone can hope for is to be honored and praised by their contemporaries. These are the recognition of a life well-lived, a life of accomplishment, achievement, and contribution. Such honor and praise are not to be denied those who deserve them (v. 18).

Honoring and praising worthy people can remind us that all honor and praise belong ultimately to God, Who gives people every good and perfect gift and allows them to make use of these for good works (Jms. 1.17). The goodness of God is in all the earth (Ps. 33.5), but only because God loves all people – even His enemies – and gives them whatever they need for doing good (Matt. 5.44, 45; 1 Cor. 4.7). Thus, whenever we honor or praise anyone, we should immediately give thanks to God for His goodness and grace. And should anyone honor or praise us, we must deflect all such encomia to the goodness and glory of God.

If we understand this, we'll be in good shape to serve God and encourage others to do the same. But those who fail to understand this, and to give thanks and praise to God, leave nothing lasting behind them when they die. They die like beasts, hardened in their souls, unredeemed, and unreceived by God Who showed them such grace all their lives (v. 20).

Pray that you might always see the light of God, leading to His praise, and that the light of Christ might penetrate the darkness of even the least honorable of lost souls (v. 19).

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Success often brings the praise of men. But in the end, darkness.
It is true for us all. Death will come regardless.
For some of us there is the hope of light, but for some, never. (Ps. 49.19)

C. T. Studd wrote: “Only one life ‘twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Jim Eliot wrote: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

These are quotes from two missionaries who gave their all to serve the Lord.

How much worldly praise they received for their efforts we do not know; but for their work in the Kingdom? They received a lasting reward!

Understanding the Gospel is requisite for seeing the light and not perishing like a beast (Ps. 49.19, 20).

It is what is necessary in choosing a life that has lasting quality, and in receiving eternal life.

The Bible tells us that “The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God” (Ps. 14.2).

We are told to “lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3.5).

“He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who keeps understanding will find good” (Prov. 19.8).

Jesus said, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand” (Mk. 7. 14).

Jesus also asked this question: “Why do you not understand My speech?” And answered: “Because you are not able to listen to My word” (Jn. 8.43).

Paul taught, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5.17).

“Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things” (2 Tim. 2.7).

Let us listen, be wise, and understand: “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 3.23; 5.8; 6 23; 10.9).

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (Jn. 3.16; 10.10; 14.15; 15.14).

By understanding this we will see the Light!

Reflection

1. What is your responsibility in helping others understand this Good News?
2. Why is God alone deserving of all final honor and praise?
3. What can you do to bring more honor and praise to God in your Personal Mission Field?

We are taught by the Psalmist, in the words which have been under our consideration, to beware of flattering ourselves in the possessions of this world, and to be principally anxious for the attainment of that happiness which is reserved for us in heaven.

John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on the Psalms 49.20*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.18-20

Pray for the leaders of our world, that they might see the light of God and seek Him and His Kingdom. Pray for your church’s leaders, that they might seek His blessing and the blessing of His people in all they do.

Sing Psalm 49.16-20, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

Let the redeemed of God take heart, though fools and all their wealth increase.

Death shall deprive him of all he owns, the grave shall make his glory cease.

Thus though he boasts, no light he sees; his end in hell shall ever be.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!

His grace and mercy let me tell!

7 The Folly of Unbelief

Opening Prayer: Psalm 49.10-12

For he sees wise men die;
Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish,
And leave their wealth to others.
Their inner thought *is that* their houses *will last* forever,
Their dwelling places to all generations;
They call *their* lands after their own names.
Nevertheless man, *though* in honor, does not remain;
He is like the beasts that perish.

Sing Psalm 49.10-12, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

See how the wise and senseless die, and leave to others all their gold.
Vainly forever they longed and hoped to have their names and glories told.
Man in his pomp will not endure; like any beast his end is sure.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Read Psalm 49; meditate on Psalm 49.10-12

Preparation

1. Why is it folly to devote yourself to riches and reputation?
2. What is the end of all who hope to redeem themselves?

Meditation

The message of the sons of Korah to the rich and powerful Gentile agents gawking about in Jerusalem is that they were living as fools if they thought that riches or reputation were the most people were meant to know in life.

Rich and famous people die all the time. Those who succeed them spend up their riches, and those who remember them will die soon enough, and all their memories with them. No amount of honor, wealth, or praise can prevent the inevitable: Live like a beast, die like one.

People are meant for more, and the sons of Korah understood this. Only God can redeem people from their folly and sin (v. 15). Those He redeems He promises to receive unto Himself, which is a bigger deal by far than being received as a foreign emissary in the court of Solomon (himself by this time lapsing into folly).

It took courage to compose this hymn. Whether or not the Gentiles who came to Jerusalem ever heard it, the rich and famous fools in Solomon's court certainly did, even the king himself. It takes courage to tell the truth to people who don't seem inclined to receive it. But this is what we have been sent to do as witnesses for Jesus (Acts 1.8). Understand this (v. 20) and let the light of Jesus shine through you day by day (v. 19).

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Money cannot buy salvation. It cannot redeem our families or friends; nor is there anything with which we can ransom their souls. We cannot afford it. No amount of wealth or power can purchase eternal life. Only Jesus could ransom and redeem mankind. But it was costly (Ps. 49.7-9).

What we can do is pray. And witness, with our lives, love, and words.

“Deliver *those who* are drawn toward death, and hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?” (Prov. 24.11, 12)

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4.2).

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Pet. 3.15-17).

And with all these words, we must add in love, because without it we are an offense, like sounding brass and clanging cymbals. Our witness must be patient and kind; not envious or egotistical, not rude or haughty, or selfish (1 Cor. 13). And we must not be afraid of those we witness to, even if they are rich and powerful (Ps. 49.5, 6).

What we desire most of all is that those we share Christ with will leave their folly of unbelief and know with certainty that God will redeem their souls from the power of the grave and receive them with love and forgiveness. Redemption that only Jesus can afford to give them.

But sometimes He allows us to wrap and deliver the gift!

Reflection

1. What is our message to the people in our Personal Mission Fields? How would you summarize it?
2. What can we do to avoid falling into the snare of thinking that riches and reputation are the way to happiness?
3. What does it mean to say that you have been redeemed and will be received by Jesus? Why is this Good News?

... whatever dignity or excellence shines forth in the Church, we are not to consider it otherwise than as the means of presenting God to our view, that we may magnify and praise him in his gifts. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on the Psalm 48.14*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 49.1-9

Pray for lost people everywhere, that they would wake up to the folly of not believing in God, face up to their need for redemption, and receive the Good News of Jesus.

Sing Psalm 49.7-9, 15

(Sagina: [*And Can It Be, That I Should Gain*](#))

No man his brother can redeem, or give a ransom for his soul.
Let him leave off the vain attempt to gather redemption's priceless toll.
Vainly he longs for eternal day, that he may not endure decay.

Refrain v. 15

My God redeems my soul from hell!
His grace and mercy let me tell!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How were the people to whom this psalm was addressed trying to “redeem” themselves? Why does this make Psalm 49 an appropriate psalm for us today?
2. What’s wrong in believing that people are merely animals? Though we share many attributes with animals, how are people different?
3. How does God redeem those He is pleased to receive? How do lost people learn about this redemption?
4. Why should all honor and praise ultimately go to God only?
5. What’s the most important lesson you have learned from our study of Psalm 49? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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