

Psalm 49 – The Money Psalm

The 49th Psalm is in company with passages such as Luke 12:16-20, Mark 10:17-27 and Mark 12:41-44 as another of those inspired sections of Sacred Scripture that teach us the proper perspective toward material blessings. The Psalm opens with an appeal to men and women of all financial classes, “both low and high, rich and poor, together.” (verse 2). The specific issue to be addressed is found in verse six as the inspired writer speaks of “they that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches.” He is dealing with that attitude to which Paul referred in I Timothy 6:10. These individuals loved money more than God. Not only was materialism the object of their faith, they proudly proclaimed their loyalty to the things of the world. “Look at all that I’ve gotten for myself,” we can hear one of them saying. “I am great because my wealth is great.” When we come to verse 16 we get the idea that some of these individuals allowed their wealth to make them power hungry. Apparently they felt that their money gave them the right to be abusive toward those who did not have as much. In verses 17 and following the Psalmist seeks to comfort those who would be the recipients of the abuse that would be doled out by these power mad money lovers. The entire Psalm is a great lesson in how to perceive worldly goods. Briefly, there are four points that are worthy of note.

The first point is that material goods cannot buy salvation. “They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.” (verses 6-9). To think that pieces of paper or chunks of metal that have value here on earth could buy favor with God in eternity is the height of foolishness. Several centuries later the apostle Peter would write, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (I Peter 1:18-19). Imagine someone trying to flash money in the face of God in an effort to purchase a home in heaven. As ludicrous as this is, still there are those who live as though this were possible.

Secondly, this Psalm teaches that, to quote a familiar phrase, “you can’t take it with you.” “For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.” (verses 10-12). “For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.” (verse 17). While these lovers of money have essentially erected monuments to themselves, they will find themselves leaving all of those things behind when they die. Eternity will have no buildings, streets or cities named after them. All that they generated for their personal glory on earth will be left behind with the veil of death separating these material tributes from their creators.

A third lesson taught by this Psalm regards the false honor that often accompanies the gain of material wealth. Verse 18 reads, “Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.” The one who lays up for himself treasures upon earth basks in the accolades given him by those of a like mind. Their praises make him feel secure, as though he truly has attained a measure of greatness. Sadly, were he to suddenly lose all of his wealth, he would likely discover that those praises came from insincere hearts who only sang them to see what they could get for themselves from the wealthy one. “Fame is fleeting,” we say. The wise man wrote in Proverbs 23:5, “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”

Finally, Psalm 49 teaches us that we need to accept prosperity for what it is. “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.” (verse 20). We need to understand that material possessions are blessings from God and that we are stewards of same. They are not the be all and end all. They are not the objects of our existence. They are tools. They are gifts from God that

He is allowing us to use while we are here on earth. Only this healthy perspective will allow us to properly place our priorities on things that cannot fade away rather than on things that perish.

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