

DEATH AND TAXES

Friday, January 30

Reading: Psalm 49

Psalm 49:16 *Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendor of their houses increases; 17 for they will take nothing with them when they die, their splendor will not descend with them. 18 Though while they live they count themselves blessed—and people praise you when you prosper— 19 they will join those who have gone before them, who will never again see the light of life.*

After winning independence from England, the new American nation limped along for almost a decade under the Articles of Confederation. This first attempt at government proved to be too weak to hold the country together. In 1789, the U.S. Constitution was ratified to take its place. In a letter to a friend, Benjamin Franklin wrote: “Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.”¹

Psalm 49 agrees with this sentiment. This wisdom psalm presents a warning to those who trust in money and long to cheat death. It reminds us that wealth is fleeting and death is inescapable. This psalm refutes the “wisdom” of the world.

The world believes that “Might makes right!” and that “Money talks!” However, the psalmist is not concerned when the wicked surround him and use their wealth and influence to advance their own agenda. He knows that all their money and power cannot “buy” their life from God’s judgement (49:5-9). Death comes to us all and you cannot take anything with you (49:10, 16-17).

The world believes the gaining of worldly knowledge will save them. They trust in themselves and their own ideas and teach them to others (49:13). However, the psalmist knows that even though these people are praised by the world, they “lack understanding” because they do not follow the Lord (49:18-20). They too will not escape death (49:10-12).

This psalm points to the harsh truth about those who trust in themselves and their resources instead of God. Their end is a reverse of Psalm 23. Instead of the Lord being their shepherd and leading them to life, “death will be their shepherd” (49:14) and they will “never again see the light of life” (49:19).

But there is one word of hope in this gloomy psalm. Verse 15 begins with “But God...” It is humanly impossible to “give God a ransom” for the debt we own (49:7-8), “but God will redeem me.” Though the wicked will “never again see the light of life” (49:19), God “will surely take me to Himself.” Instead of demanding that we pay the ransom for our sins, God pays our debt instead. The psalmist is not sure how God will ransom his life but he is confident that He will spend eternity with the Lord.

The missing piece of the puzzle is Jesus. By His death He redeemed us from the power of sin and death and set us free to serve Him. Do not envy the wealthy and powerful! Instead “put your hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment...so that [we] may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_and_taxes_\(idiom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_and_taxes_(idiom))