Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Have you seen movies or read books that have a wise old man or woman who lives in a cave up a mountain? And the wise person is about 180 years old and people come from far and wide to visit them to seek guidance with their problems. And once they receive guidance, they pay with a chicken or some bread, etc. You know what I am talking about? Well, today we call these people therapists. And they have flash offices, and we visit them every week, and we pay $240 per hour! But all jokes aside, I mention this because the Psalm before us today is a wisdom Psalm.

Last week I explained that we are considering Psalms that point to the person and work of Jesus in an **indirect** way. And most of the Psalms are indirect messianic Psalms.

And we are currently considering the first of three categories of indirect messianic Psalm, which are the **Psalms of Orientation**. And they are Psalms that just boldly declare the truth about God and life.

So, last week, we looked at one type of Orientation Psalm which is the **hymn**. But today we will look at another type, which is the **wisdom Psalm**. And the most well-known wisdom Psalm is Psalm 19, which is about how God reveals Himself to all people in creation, and in a saving way through the Scriptures. But I have preached on Psalm 19 before, so today we consider Psalm 49.

And our main aim is to see **how Psalm 49 reveals the person and work of Jesus**. But as ever, to get there, we must first consider the Psalm in its Old Testament context. Who wrote this Psalm? What is it about? What does it teach us about God and the world and ourselves as God’s people?

Well, what we are going to see as we work through this Psalm is that **God’s People Will be Redeemed from Their Troubles**. And we will see this under four headings: The **Riddle** of the Rich, **Do Not Fear** the Rich, The **Limits** of Riches, and Our Rich **Redeemer**.

1. So, let’s begin with **the Riddle of the Rich**. And we see this in verses 1-4.
   1. I stated earlier that this Psalm is a wisdom Psalm. **Verse 3** makes that very plain: “*My mouth shall speak wisdom*.” And verse 4 reveals that this Psalm solved a **riddle**. And a riddle, boys and girls, is a puzzle or a mystery. So, someone had a riddle, and this Psalm was a song that was composed to answer or solve the riddle.
      1. And this riddle-solving wisdom song was composed by the **Sons of Korah**, as the heading explains. The Sons of Korah were Levites, who were appointed by King David to compose and play and sing songs in the tabernacle and later on in the temple. And there are 11 Psalms that were composed by the Sons of Korah.
      2. And it is easy to imagine the people of Israel coming to the Temple seeking wisdom about the topic that this Psalm addresses. You see, way back in **Deuteronomy** and **Leviticus**, God said to the people of Israel: If you obey my commandments, I will bless you with riches and health, but if you disobey me, I will curse you with poverty and disease. And Proverbs says the same thing: **Proverbs 10:22**: “*The blessing of the LORD makes rich*.” **Proverbs 13:22**: “*A good man leaves an inheritance to His children's children, but the sinner's wealth [goes to] the righteous*.” Thus, according to the law, the obedient will be rich and the disobedient will be poor. So, you can imagine the people of Israel turning up to the temple and asking the Sons of Korah: How come there are hypocrites and unbelievers who are rich, when we who try and keep God’s commandments are poor? How come there are wicked and unbelieving nations that are rich when Israel is poor? Why do cheats seem to get away with it and even prosper? Why is it like this? How can this be? We do not understand this mystery.
   2. **And** **maybe you have asked the same sort of question yourself**: You really try and obey the Lord, but you have a disability or an illness or poverty. And others, who do not give a moment’s thought to God, are healthy and rich? Why, God? Have I done something to deserve this misery? Do you not care? Have you asked a question like this, before? Are you asking it today, perhaps?
   3. So, that’s the riddle that this Psalm answers: Why are there rich people who are wicked? Why do cheats seem to get away with it and prosper? How come the righteous can endure real misery and persecution? And the Sons of Korah are saying, Friend, you have come to the right place. We have God’s answer to this riddle and it is something that **everyone needs to hear**. And so, they begin the Psalm with a call to absolutely everyone, “*low and high, rich and poor together*,” to pay attention to this wisdom song.
2. So, that’s the **riddle of the rich**. And now we move into the first half of the answer to the riddle, verses 5-12, which is where we are told: **Do not Fear the Rich**.
   1. I don’t know if you noticed as we read through the Psalm, but **verses 12 and 20** are almost identical – “*Man in his pomp … is like the beasts.*” They function kind of like a **chorus** or a refrain. So, verses 5 to 12 are the first stanza of the answer, and verses 13 to 20 are the second stanza of the answer.
   2. I mentioned a moment ago that oftentimes it seems like **those who cheat seem to get away with it and prosper**. Have you noticed that? And if you are trying to be honest and hard-working this can be very frustrating and disheartening. And that is the situation that verse 5 has in view – prospering cheats. And not only were these cheats prospering, they were also boasting of their wealth, as we see in verse 6. And in terms of the times when this Psalm was written, this may have been a reference to wicked people in Israel or wicked nations around them. But this scenario is not unique to Bible times. All throughout history, cheats have made it into positions of authority and power. And the rich often trust in their wealth and boast about their riches. And so, for simple farmers or labourers or servants or slaves, who are poor by comparison, it is easy to give in to fear in relation to people like this.
   3. But look at how the sons of Korah respond to this riddle: “*Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches?*” In other words, the sons of Korah are saying, “You have no need to fear people like this …” And the reason that the sons of Korah say this is spelled out in **verses 7 through 12**:
      1. The first part of it is **verses 7 through 9**. And these verses are a truth declaration: “*Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit*.”
         1. A very famous French philosopher was a man named **Voltaire**. He wrote books and articles that ridiculed Christianity. But when he was sick and on his death bed, it is reported that he said to his doctor, “I will give you half of all my possessions if you will give me just six more months of life.” But of course, it wouldn’t have mattered how much he paid his doctor, “*no man can ransom another … that he should not see the pit* (by which is meant death).” No one can make his own life one day longer than God has ordained it to be. And no amount of money can by an extension of life, from a doctor or anyone else. That is the reality that the Sons of Korah declare here.
      2. And it is because of this reality that the Sons of Korah continue with **verses 10-12**: “*For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they called lands by their own names. Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish*.”
         1. Two men were once talking on the train about the death notice of a very well-known and wealthy man who had died. One asked the other, “How much did he leave behind?” His friend smirkingly replied, “Everything!”
         2. And you have probably heard the sayings: You never see a hearse with a trailer. And you never see a burial shroud with pockets.
         3. And that is why, in this respect, we are just like the beasts/animals. It doesn’t matter how important or rich a person is, we all die.
         4. **And you can't take it with you when you die**!
      3. And this is why we need not fear the cheats and the wicked rich – despite their boasting and their ‘success,’ ultimately, they too will die.
3. And this brings us to the second half of the answer of the sons of Korah, verses 13 to 20. And here the focus moves to beyond the grave and eternity. And so, here we see **the Limits of Riches**.
   1. In **verse 13,** the Sons of Korah call the wicked “*those who have foolish confidence.*” And in the last half of verse 13, they refer to the followers or the sycophants of the wicked rich. I am sure you will have noticed that no matter how much a person cheats or commits wickedness, they always have supporters and followers, don’t they. But in **verse 14**, the Sons of Korah return to the theme of the grave being the destiny of all mankind. And the language they use is that of sheep following their shepherd into *Sheol*, which is the Hebrew term for the grave or the realm of the dead.
   2. But what makes this second stanza of the Psalm different from the first is that in the middle of verse 14 and in verse 15 the Sons of Korah speak of **something beyond death**. In verse 14, it is described as “*the morning*” or a new day after death. In verse 15 it is described as being ransomed “*from the power of* *Sheol*” and being received by God. So, while the Sons of Korah, in verse 7, said that “*no man can ransom another*,” here in verse 15 they describe the confidence of the believer, which is that “*God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol*.” So, what *we* cannot do *God* can do. And what is in view here is our resurrection to eternal life.
      1. Our very first lockdown livestream service was back on March 22, 2020. We setup a camera and laptop in my dining room and sent out a Youtube link, pressed record and held our breath, and it worked! It seems like a long time ago, doesn’t it! Well, just a few weeks later, it was Easter time. And so, on Easter Sunday, I preached to you about **how the Old Testament teaches the resurrection**. We looked at a whole variety of passages that point forward to the resurrection of Jesus, and the general resurrection of all people at the end of time, and the resurrection to eternal life of believers. And verse 15 of Psalm 49 was one of the verses that we looked at. It doesn't go into a lot of detail but with simple confidence it expresses trust that God will ransom the soul of the believer from the power of Sheol or death.
         1. And this verse, along with many others in the Bible, are why we believe that at the moment of death the soul of the believer goes to be with Christ in heaven. And there it awaits the day when Christ will return to earth, bringing the souls of believers with Him, which will then be reunited with their resurrected and glorified bodies. And with the help of the New Testament, we can see it here in verse 15. And we will say more about this in our fourth and final point in a few moments.
   3. But the wonderful reality of eternal life for the believer has a flip side, doesn’t it, which is eternity in hell for unbelievers. And that is why the Sons of Korah continue with **verses 16 to 20**: “*Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him. For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed,- and though you get praise when you do well for yourself- his soul will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never again see light. Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish*.” So, the key point here is that we should not fear cheats and the wicked rich, because though life may seem good for them for a while, a terrible eternity in hell awaits them if they refuse to repent. And there are two phrases in this section that are worth reflecting on for a few moments:
      1. Verse 19 says of them that they “*will never again see light*.” And this is not just a poetic image. Do you ever wonder what hell is like? The Scriptures speak of fire that is never quenched and worms that never die and a gnashing of teeth. Here we read that those in hell will never again see light. In other words, hell is a place of unspeakable horrors and agonies. Whatever is good and enjoyable in this life will not be in hell.
         1. One of the terms I have often used to describe hell is as a place of awful **loneliness**. And my wife once said to me, what do you mean by loneliness? Surely, there will be billions of people in hell, won’t there!? And of course, she is right; there will be billions of people in hell. But the reason I said loneliness is because there will be no friendship in hell. So, despite there being other people, they will all be enemies. So, there will be no comfort of the crowd; there will just be overwhelming loneliness.
         2. And if we understand that, we will not fear the wicked because we know, however miserable our lives might be now, we will enjoy eternal light and friendship while they will endure eternal darkness and loneliness.
      2. But the other phrase that is significant in this section is the bit that is added to the refrain: “*man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish*.” And this should remind us of **Ecclesiastes**. For the key point of Ecclesiastes is that life is meaningless if it is lived apart from Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ that gives true meaning and joy and hope to life. So, if you do not know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then it does not matter how ‘good’ your life is now, it is not the best that life can be, and it will be followed by hell.
4. And this leads right into our final point, which is **Our Rich Redeemer**.
   1. Verse 6 speaks of those who “*trust in their wealth*.” And verse 13 says, “*This is the path of those who have foolish confidence,*” which the NIV translates as “*those who trust in themselves*.” And this gets us right to the heart of the contrast that is laid out in this Psalm. **The wicked and foolish rich trust in themselves and their riches, but the wise man or woman trusts in God**. The wise man or woman or young person or boy or girl believes that God will ransom his or her soul from death and receive him or her to eternal life. And the key word here is **ransom**. The word that the NIV uses is **redeem**. And both words helpfully translate the Hebrew word that is used here. And they are prominent themes that the Old Testament uses to prepare the way for and point forward to Jesus.
      1. The rescue of Israel from Egypt is often described as a **redemption**.
      2. Passover involved killing a lamb and putting its blood on the doorposts. And this lamb was the ‘**ransom** **price’** for the firstborn of Israel; it died in their place.
      3. And throughout the ceremonial law, a **ransom** or **redemption** price could be paid in place of property or animals or even people. So, instead of sacrificing or handing over the item or person, you ransomed or redeemed them.
      4. And this was mandatory in relation to firstborn male babies in Israel. They had to be brought to the temple and the father had to pay the **ransom** price of a lamb and a dove, or two doves or pigeons if the family was poor.
      5. The law also included the role of the **kinsmen-redeemer**. This was a relative who could pay the debts of a family member or pay the price to set them free from slavery. It is a key part of the story of Ruth.
      6. In **Zechariah 10:8**, God said of His people, “*I will redeem them*.”
      7. And all of this is why, in **Luke 2:38**, Simeon is described as among “*all those looking for redemption in Jerusalem*.” To be an Old Testament believer was to be one who was waiting for the Redeemer.
      8. And so, as we come to the New Testament and the coming of Jesus, we find:
         1. That when Jesus was born, His parents presented Him at the temple and paid the redemption price.
         2. And in **Matthew 20:28**, Jesus said, “*Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*.”
         3. **1 Peter 1:18-19** says, “*Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*.”
         4. And **Hebrews 9:12** says, “*He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption*.”
      9. Jesus is the ransom price/Redeemer who secures eternal life for all who put their trust in Him. We could not pay the price, as verse 7 makes plain. But God was able to pay the price, which He did, by the precious blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

So, having brought the riddle of riches to the Sons of Korah, we have our answer: Do not trust in riches and do not fear the wicked rich. Money, cars, houses – you can’t take it with you when you die.

And the messianic message of this Psalm is this: Trust in God because He can redeem you from all your troubles through faith in Christ. Believe in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. Make Him your priority, not riches.

* In terms of this life: “*Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*.”
* But know that beyond this life, you will be raised to eternal life and light and joy and health and friendship and every other good blessing imaginable! This is the promise of your God. Amen