



The Foolishness of Materialism

Psalm 49

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Materialism

- Materialism (or perhaps better, practical materialism) is the belief that one's main goal in life is to accumulate enough wealth and power to live pleasantly.
- It is a very widespread belief, probably the most popular religion at all times throughout history, and not just among the rich.
- This view is seriously flawed, as we shall see in Psalm 49.
- First we give a translation, then we come back to unpack the psalm.

Introduction (vv 1-4)

1 Hear this, all you people!

Listen, all inhabitants of the world!

2 Both commoners and nobles,

Rich and poor together.

3 My mouth will speak wisdom,

The meditation of my heart will be understanding.

4 I will turn my ear toward a parable;

I will explain my riddle on the harp.

The Problem (5-6): Materialism

- 5 Why should I fear in days of adversity,
When the iniquity of my enemies surrounds me?
- 6 Those who trust in their power
And boast in the greatness of their wealth?

The Real Situation (7-20)

- 7 Surely no one can ransom his brother,
Nor give God his redemption.
- 8 For the redemption of his soul is costly,
That it should ever be paid in full,
- 9 That he should live forever,
Not to see the grave.

The Real Situation (7-20)

- 10 Indeed, even he sees that wise men die,
The fool and the brute perish together,
And they leave their wealth to others.
- 11 Their thought is that their houses last forever,
And their dwelling is from generation to generation.
They name their lands after themselves.
- 12 But man in his splendor will not remain
He is like the beasts which perish.

The Real Situation (7-20)

13 This is their foolish way;

Yet those who come after them approve their words.

14 Like sheep they are appointed for the grave;

Death will be their shepherd.

In the morning the upright will subdue them.

15 But God will redeem my soul;

Indeed, He will rescue me from the power of the grave.

The Real Situation (7-20)

16 Do not be afraid when someone becomes rich,
When the glory of his house increases.

17 For in his death he will take nothing with him;
His glory will not descend with him.

18 Though he used to congratulate himself while he
lived

n And men will praise you when you do well for
yourself n

The Real Situation (7-20)

19 Yet he will go down to the generation of his fathers;

He will never again see the light.

20 Man in his splendor, but without understanding,
Is like the beasts that perish.

Introduction (1-4)

- This psalm is for everyone, rich & poor, common & elite. (1-2)
- Its message gives insight (and comes from God). (3)
- Yet it is not commonly understood, but is to most people like a riddle or parable. (4)

The Problem (5-6)

- The problem is that most people believe in practical materialism, and so tend to live that way.
- We are all easily influenced in our attitudes & actions by social pressure:
 - So the poor fear oppression by the wealthy & powerful (5-6).
 - The rich trust in their wealth & power to get through life (6).

The Problem (5-6)

- This is not a new problem in our so-called modern materialistic culture.
- It has been a dominant force throughout history, from the earliest times.
- Attempts to solve this by means of social legislation in recent centuries have not really worked.
- People are still materialists.

The Real Situation (7-20)

- No one is wealthy (or powerful) enough to buy back his life from God. (7-9)
 - Is 8b referring to an installment purchase?
- Instead everyone dies (wise & foolish, rich & poor), and they don't take it with them. (10, 17)
- Not even the wealth left behind will stay in the family to memorialize the person. (11-12)

The Real Situation (7-20)

- As foolish as practical materialism is (11, 13, 18), it is considered praiseworthy & wise by most people.
- Yet the grave will end such glory (12, 20, 14, 17, 19)
 - They will never again see prosperity. (19)
 - The upright will dominate beyond the grave. (14)

The Solution (15-16)

- 15 But God will redeem my soul;
 - Indeed, He will rescue me from the power of the grave.
- 16 Do not be afraid when someone becomes rich,
 - When the glory of his house increases.
- Don't trust in wealth or political power.
 - (implied throughout)

The Solution (15-16)

- Don't be afraid of wealth or political power wielded by your enemies. (16)
- Trust & fear God:
 - He alone can buy back your life. (15)
- 12 But man in his splendor will not remain
 - He is like the beasts which perish.
- 20 Man in his splendor, but without understanding,
 - Is like the beasts that perish.

