


PSALM 49:16-20  
HOW WILL YOUR EPITAPH READ?

“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.”<sup>1</sup>

pitaphs provide rich evidence that mankind does have a sense of humour. At least that is the case for those merry souls who have died in Canada and the United States. On the grave of Ezekial Aikle in East Dalhousie Cemetery, Nova Scotia is an epitaph that reads:

Here lies Ezekial Aikle, Age 102  
The Good Die Young

He sounds as if he was an interesting man.

Lester Moore, a Wells Fargo station agent in Tombstone, Arizona, was shot and killed during a robbery. His grave marker, located in Boothill Cemetery, reads:

Here lies Lester Moore,  
Four slugs from a forty-four.  
No Les,  
No Moore.

In Ruidoso, New Mexico, the gravestone of John Yeast states:

Here lies John Yeast,  
Pardon me for not rising.

In Uniontown, Pennsylvania, a tombstone of a man killed in a vehicle crash is inscribed with the following statement:

Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake,  
Stepped on the gas instead of the brake.

A favourite memorial statement in my estimate is recorded on a headstone in Thurmont, Maryland; it reads simply:

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Here lies an atheist,  
All dressed up and,  
No place to go.

On a grave from the 1880's in Nantucket, Massachusetts is an epitaph that speaks of confidence in what follows this life.

Under the sod and under the trees  
Lies the body of Jonathan Pease  
He is not here, there's only the pod:  
Pease shelled out and went to God.

Each of us faces the prospect of having an epitaph inscribed on a piece of granite. How will your epitaph read? How will you be remembered? If the Master delays His return, each of us listening to this message will taste death. Barring the Master's return as He has promised, death is the destiny of each of us. The only monuments with lasting value that we will leave are the memories of those who have known us and the impact of our lives on others. The memory of who we were, the memory resulting from the impact of our character will have greater endurance than all our possessions.

The **FORTY-NINTH PSALM** focuses on death. The Psalmist reminds readers that God alone is capable of providing a ransom for the soul of an individual. He forces us, in the tenth verse, to consider the common fate of all mankind. The wise man, the foolish and the stupid alike die. Wealth and great assets are meaningless when death comes. Arriving at the final strophe, the Psalmist leaves us with valuable insight. That portion of this excellent Psalm is the focus of our attention in this hour.

Nearly all commentators divide this Psalm into five parts. The first four verses form an introduction. Verses five through nine speak of the foolishness of trusting riches. Verses ten through twelve remind us of the inevitability of death. Verses 13 through 15 provide a contrast between those who trust riches and those who trust God. The final strophe, which serves as our text, is an appeal to be wise concerning life.

**A SITUATION THAT IS FOREIGN TO MOST OF US** — This sobering Psalm assuredly addresses modern Canadians. Clearly, the Psalmist is cautioning against depending upon wealth and position to influence God. Christians should be respectful of all people; we should respect all mankind and not only the powerful and the well to do who are transiting this dying world. This is the teaching of James. “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” [**JAMES 2:1**].

We are a wealthy people. Perhaps we doubt that assessment, but we are wealthy. Most of us have so many labour saving devices that we cannot find the time to do all that we are expected to do. I invest more hours in front of the monitor doing research and preparing sermons than did any preacher of past decades. I seriously doubt that I have more insight than did a Spurgeon or a Criswell—I know I have less power with God. Modern Canadians have so many opportunities for recreation that we exhaust ourselves attempting to be refreshed. We have almost universally bought into the modern myth that wealth is equated with power, and we almost unconsciously absorb that myth.

We are counted among the privileged few of the world. Our needs are amply supplied, though our wants grow continually. It is doubtful that any of us have ever known what it is to be hungry, to be homeless, to struggle to cover our nakedness. Though there are scam artists who make the circuits of churches attempting to separate the people of God from their moneys, for the most part people who truly have needs will find assistance. This is especially true if an individual is willing to work, even though the work may be considered menial.

The death of an infant in Canada is sufficiently rare that such an event is counted the exception, unlike some African nations where a child is 30 times more likely to die before age five. Almost four in ten children in southern Africa die within the first 28 days following birth. We know no such conditions in Canada. Even here in the north, health care is available—our water is clean, we have adequate housing and we are clothed for the weather.

The Psalmist begins the Psalm by speaking of opposition from the wealthy. He is speaking of spiritual abuse at the hands of the rich and famous. When I read verses five and six, I must ask myself, what do I actually know of abuse by the wealthy and the powerful? What do I truly know concerning spiritual opposition? How do I suffer spiritually? The Psalmist speaks of a situation unknown to most of us, though that could change at any time.

I am unacquainted with suffering. I cannot spiritualise this Psalm enough to make it apply directly to myself, though I have known some deprived people. On one occasion, I invited two post-doctoral fellows to share Thanksgiving dinner. These men were from Taiwan; they were studying in the school where I was completing my doctoral studies. Lynda had provided a simple meal that day, though there was sufficient food for all. There was no turkey; we did not have enough money for that. We had a small canned ham instead. There were plenty of vegetables and there were some cold cuts available. There was a fine dessert, and we were able to offer juice, tea or and coffee to accompany the meal.

As my guests surveyed what we thought to be a meagre table, one, with tears in his eyes, commented, “How wealthy you are! We had so little when I was a child. I saved every rice sack, because I never knew when I would need the cloth to cover my nakedness.” That comment certainly placed my situation into a global perspective. I’ve never eaten a Thanksgiving meal since that time without thinking of that comment.

I was privileged to minister to a black church in Dallas; it was a rich experience. I received the honorific title of “Apostle to the Blacks” from one beloved pastor in that black community. I recall with deep humility the prayer of one elderly deacon as he approached the altar to give thanks for the privilege of giving one Sunday morning.

“Massa’ Jesus,” spoke that humble saint. “Thank you for lettin’ me worship. Din’t have no breakfast this mo’ning; but I fed on the Word today. Don’ have no new shoes to wear; but You give me two strong legs to carry me to the house of the Lawd.” As he prayed, I was humbled thinking of my own life. When he had finished praying, the worshippers rejoiced as they brought their gifts, ushered row-by-row to the front of the auditorium to place their gifts in the offering plate situated in front of the pulpit. That deacon’s humility and his joy, and the evident joy of the people at having something to share, stand out in my memory to this day. But I knew that I was not deprived.

**A CONDITION THAT IS COMMON TO ALL OF US** — Nevertheless, the Psalmist puts his finger on the pulse of a modern idolatry that has infected much of Christendom. Despite knowing intuitively that wealth tends to arrogance, we nevertheless admire the wealthy. Why else do the tabloids feature stories about the rich and famous? Why else are news reports often filled with accounts detailing which Hollywood harlot married which Hollywood rake? We believe there is something special about such public figures that live life on their own selfish terms; in our hearts, we wish we could live that same way.

We become positively sudorific if we imagine that the famous of this world might take notice of us. The mere acknowledgement by a politician, the casual glance of a star or a starlet is diaphoretic for most of us. On one occasion my eldest daughter was rushing to catch a bus in downtown Vancouver when rounding the corner she collided with a man. He caught her before she fell and asked if she wanted his autograph.

“Well, no,” responded Susan incredulously. “Do you want mine?”

When he had walked on, several people standing nearby gazed starry eyed in the direction of his travel. “Do you know who that was?” one woman gushed.

“No,” responded Susan.

“That was Bryan Adams. He touched you,” the young woman sighed.

I am astounded to read of Christian leaders practically swooning when invited to pray with a serial adulterer who is able to fund his own presidential campaign.<sup>2</sup> Even during the 1960s, American politicians manipulated Evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Catholics by inviting their pastors and priests to savour the power of the White House.<sup>3</sup> The trappings of power are seductive to any individual—preachers are not immune.

Though we are impoverished through their financial demands, we still flock to every store opening that features an arthritic has-been hockey player. Though we are morally impoverished through watching their tawdry cinematic escapades, nevertheless, we cannot wait until another movie featuring our favourite actress or actor is released. We watch each political drama unfold as though it will actually matter one hundred years from now, and when the politicians return to their ridings, we hang on their every word as though they were knowledgeable about the issues. We are infected with an abhorrent condition that contaminates us utterly—we are infatuated with power and with wealth.

Elders and deacons serving among the people of God frequently appear to be chosen because of their social standing or chosen because of their earthly holdings instead of their righteous walk or even because of their boldness in Christ. Thus, a kind of moral sludge oozes even within the precincts of God’s churches. Plainspoken men and women who fear sin and honour God are desperately needed among the faithful.

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Allen, “Robert Jeffress prays ‘special blessing’ on Donald Trump, BaptistNews.com, September 16, 2015, <https://baptistnews.com/culture/politics/item/30480-robert-jeffress-prays-special-blessing-on-donald-trump>, accessed 29 September 2015; David Brody, “Only on the Brody File,” September 29, 2015, <http://blogs.cbn.com/thebrodyfile/archive/2015/09/29/only-on-the-brody-file-religious-leaders-meet-pray-with.aspx>, accessed 30 September 29, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Documented in such books as, Daniel K. Williams, **God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right** (Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, NY 2010); Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, **The Preacher and the Presidents** (Hachette Book Group, New York, NY 2007); Laura Jane Gifford, **The Right Side of the Sixties: Reexamining Conservatism’s Decade of Transformation** (Palgrave MacMillan, New York, NY 2012); Charles W. Colson and Ellen Santilli Vaughn, **Kingdoms in Conflict** (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI 2007)

God does, from time-to-time, raise up such individuals. They aren't always terribly considerate of the feelings of those to whom they are sent, but they do speak the Word of God with power. There have always been some who handed the hot end of the poker to those to whom they were sent. Peter Cartwright was one such man. A powerful Methodist preacher on the American frontier, he disdained the tendency, evident even then, for preachers to be obsequious in the presence of the famous and the powerful. The United States Methodist Conference of 1818 was held in Nashville, and Cartwright was appointed to preach in a local Methodist church.

As it happened, General Andrew Jackson entered as the preacher was reading his text, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) With all the seats already occupied, the famous Indian fighter and war hero was content to stand, gracefully leaning on the middle post of the building. At the sight of his stately appearance, the host pastor, a certain "Brother Mac," became nervous in the extreme. Seated on the platform directly behind the pulpit, he tugged on Cartwright's jacket, whispering, "General Jackson has come in; General Jackson has come in." Cartwright was aghast at the pastor's obvious double standard.

I cite Cartwright's autobiography in relating what happened next. Cartwright writes, "I felt a flash of indignation run all over me like an electric shock, and facing about to my congregation, and purposely speaking out audibly, I said, 'Who is General Jackson? If he don't get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as he would a Guinea [Negro].' The preacher tucked his head down, and squatted low, and would, no doubt, have been thankful for leave of absence. The congregation, General Jackson and all, smiled or laughed right out, all at the preacher's expense.

"When the congregation was dismissed, my city-stationed preacher stepped up to me and very sternly said to me: 'You are the strangest man I ever saw, and General Jackson will chastise you for your insolence before you leave the city.'

'Very clear of it,' said I, 'for General Jackson, I have no doubt, will applaud my course; and if he should undertake to chastise me... there is two as can play that game.'

"Next morning, very early, my city preacher went down to the hotel to make an apology to General Jackson for my conduct in the pulpit the night before. Shortly after he had left I passed by the hotel and I met the General on the pavement; and before I approached him by several steps he smiled, and reached out his hand and said: 'Mr. Cartwright, you are a man after my own heart. I am very surprised at Mr. Mac, to think that I would be offended at you. No, sir; I told him that I highly approved of your independence, that a minister of Jesus Christ ought to love everybody and fear no mortal man. I told Mr. Mac that if I had a few thousand such independent, fearless officers as you were, and a well drilled army, I could take Old England.'"<sup>4</sup>

Among the comments that the noted British Baptist, Charles Spurgeon provides in his excellent study of the Psalms, are these that concentrates our focus on the failure of wealth at death. "He has but a leasehold of his acres, and death ends his tenure. Through the river of death man must pass naked. Not a rag of all his raiment, not a coin of all his treasure, not a jot of all his honour, can the dying worldling carry with him."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> W. P. Strickland, ed., *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, The Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton & Porter Publishers, 1857), 192

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 27-57, vol. 2* (Marshall Brothers, London; Edinburgh; New York n.d.) 373

If his words concerning possessions appear pointed, how much more pointed do his observations appear concerning the uselessness of position when an individual dies! “As he goes down, down, down for ever, none of his honours or possessions will follow him. Patents of nobility are invalid in the sepulchre. His worship, his honour, his lordship and his grace, will alike find their titles ridiculous in the tomb. Hell knows no aristocracy. Your dainty and delicate sinners shall find that eternal burnings have no respect for their affectations and refinements.”<sup>6</sup>

I have observed in my years of service before the Lord a disturbing trend among those who are appointed to declare eternal truths from the pulpit of the Lord. I note that either tacitly or pointedly, pastors are urged to defer to the wealthy and pressed to demonstrate consideration of the powerful. “Flatter them,” we are told. “Show them consideration according to their social standing.” This is advice that I have been unable to embrace throughout the years of my service before the Lord. I am not deliberately rude, but I am determined that I shall not be obsequious.

On one occasion, a denominational leader sought to assess my willingness to serve a church noted for its wealthy membership. The man approaching me decided quickly that he had spoken in an unguarded moment, for as soon as he inquired about my willingness to serve in that particular church he checked himself before bluntly stating, “Never mind. It would never work. You do not respect money.”

I suppose this is true. As the academic dean of a black college informed me during a discussion on one occasion, “If you don’t never got it, you don’t never miss it.” I’ve never had it.

I have observed that position and wealth often count more for advancement within and among the churches than godliness. Credentials and connections are more highly valued than is character in searching out pastoral leadership. Whenever a church seeks pastoral leadership, it is far more likely that they will review what schools the candidate has attended instead of reviewing whether that one wins souls and lives a godly life. It is far more likely that the congregation will be more impressed by who the candidate knows than they will be by what those outside the Faith think of his character.

In a broad, general sense, I note that preachers, indeed, the entire Christian public, flock to listen to the famous and the powerful address the saints. It matters little if the address proves vapid and banal; the great one is nevertheless adulated. However, the humble saint who labours quietly, honouring God in relative obscurity, is despised.

I recall an occasion when I had invited a humble man to address the student body at a Christian college I served. That humble man at that time had personally planted seventy-five churches then in existence. If one counted all the daughter churches and granddaughter churches together with those he personally planted, the number of churches in existence through his influence was more than 125.

Those students were used to hearing the famous and the notable speak, and when that humble man stood, they observed that he was rudely dress. He appeared uncertain as he approached the pulpit—he had never stood before so many people in his life. When he began to speak—haltingly, tentatively—he simply related the spiritual need of vast regions of the nation. He told of multiplied small communities where the Gospel was no longer preached, and he made a plea for some who heard him to weigh the call of God to serve in a place where the great crowds likely would never know of their existence.

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<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon, *ibid.*

I sat in the audience, and I heard the mutterings of many of the students as they questioned why such a “nobody” would be invited to speak. On any given week, these students would hear men whose names were known throughout the world, and here was this cowboy who could barely speak coherently because he was so timid before a crowd. After what seemed an inordinate amount of time, the Dean of Students stood to dismiss the students. Before dismissing them, he stated that he saw Christ in that humble man. He commented, “We have been honoured, and Christ has been glorified. Brother Benny loves Christ deeply, and he loves sinners for whom Christ died. You feel as you listen to him that if you punched him, love would pour out everywhere you punched him.”

Those students received more from that humble man than they ever realised. They had witnessed someone who had a message born out of life and born out of walking with the Master, and not a sterile account dug from the depths of some dusty tome.

We need to apply the teaching of the Wise Man to our lives.

“The fear of man lays a snare,  
but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.  
Many seek the face of a ruler,  
but it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.”

[PROVERBS 29:25, 26]

According to Solomon, God gives wealth—we do not obtain what we hold through our own strength [see ECCLESIASTES 5:19; 6:2]. Likewise, position and status are not the result of our own strength; rather, position and status are the result of God’s goodness and mercy toward us [see PSALM 75:6, 7]. Though possessions, position and power are from God, they nevertheless impose responsibility upon the one who has received these gifts.

Since God gives wealth and since position is through His divine permission, we do well to realise that all that we hold is held as a stewardship. Solomon, a man who was accustomed to wealth and power, wrote, “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind” [ECCLESIASTES 2:24-26].

What God gives has been given for our enjoyment; however, we are also responsible to administer His grace in all its forms with wisdom. Whatever our standing in life, we must give an answer to God—for He has given richly. If the moneys I administer are used solely for my benefit, however noble the justification I attempt to advance for consuming my holdings on my own desires, I must recognise that my enjoyment is limited to time and not for eternity. If I will honour God, I must be responsible in administering wealth and power, possessions and position.

God has given you wealth, and all you possess is given for your enjoyment. However, if you squander what you possess solely on your own pleasure, you have misunderstood both the joy that comes from honouring God and you have missed the deep satisfaction that comes from voluntarily using your goods and your influence to glorify Him.

Perhaps you will recall a parable that Jesus told concerning a wealthy man. “[Jesus] told ... a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” And he said, “I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” [LUKE 12:16-21]. This is a sobering parable precisely because it argues that the individual is responsible to God for what is done with what has been entrusted to his oversight. Wealth is given to be used to honour God and to serve others.

Difficult as it may be for us to believe, riches are nevertheless destined for dust. That which is considered precious in this world is useful only for what it now purchases. If it is not invested in that which is eternal, it has no true or eternal value. The streets of glory are paved with gold—gold is only paving material. The walls of the eternal city are diamond—diamonds are as valuable as river rock in this world. The things that we call precious now have no value in eternity. In a true sense, we accumulate garbage here. Though one man’s garbage heap is larger than another man’s pile of garbage, it is garbage nevertheless. We are foolish if we account one man better than another because his pile of garbage is larger.

Among the professed people of God, perhaps even within this congregation, are some do not believe that the manner in which they handle wealth matters in the sight of God. Such people console themselves by saying that they “must” provide for their own comfort, they “must” provide for the future, or they “must” do this or do that with their holdings. Yet, many of these same individuals have never relieved the poverty of a single needy person, and they give a pittance in support of the church that nourishes them. They are so focused on the immediate that they do not believe in the eternal. They have become practical atheists, though they are regular in attendance at worship services and though they are counted as belonging to Christ. God calls such people fools.

Do we believe Jesus? He instructs us, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” [MATTHEW 6:19-21]. Your treasury is revealed through where your mind turns when it is free to go where it will. Where you invest your moneys and your influence demonstrates what you truly value.

I am not urging you to neglect obligations, but I am cautioning you that if your sole focus is this life, remember that you must leave it all behind. I am not admonishing you to neglect your family, nor even to incur great debt, but I am warning you that to live without understanding that this moment called life is transient is foolish in the extreme. What a powerful concluding statement the Psalmist gives us! “Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish” [PSALM 49:26]. Assets are not condemned; rather, it is our attitude toward assets that is under scrutiny. Riches are not condemned, but our attitude toward riches brings divine censure. Wealth tends to blind us to our absolute dependence upon God, and hence the rich and the powerful are tempted to become like unthinking beasts with respect to God.

Though in this world, the rich command respect, in death they become like all others. Whether a rock star, or a homeless woman, the body of each alike rots equally fast in the grave. The grave imposes true democracy; all alike are reduced to a common condition. Charles Spurgeon pointedly comments, “Where the former generations lie, the present shall also slumber. The sires beckon to their sons to come to the land of forgetfulness. Mortal fathers beget not immortal children.”<sup>7</sup>

**A WARNING THAT IS URGED UPON EACH OF US** — Life is brief, death is coming. I have but a brief moment called “now” to prepare for eternity. The rabbim were wont to say that this life is the anteroom to eternity. The saying was encouragement to people to prepare for the certainty of death. If the Psalmist’s final statement describes my situation, I will have lost everything. As already noted, the twentieth verse cautions each reader, “Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish” [PSALM 46:20].

Throughout the Word of God are multiplied statements urging us to fear God. Among these multiplied statements that are apropos is one that was penned by Solomon. Solomon authored the dark review of human life without God that we know as Ecclesiastes. Drawing that book to a conclusion, in ECCLESIASTES 12:13, 14 Solomon offers this excellent advice intended for each individual facing the future. “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

The Lord, recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, instructs those who are His disciples, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” [MATTHEW 10:28]. Summarising instructions for righteous living delivered to all Christians, Peter includes that warning that is recorded in 1 PETER 2:17. “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” A warning delivered by a holy angel during the final phase of judgements that will be delivered during the Great Tribulation is recorded in the Apocalypse. That warning will be declared so that all mankind hears. “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” [REVELATION 14:7].

What I fear becomes evident through where I invest what has been entrusted to me. If I fear man, I invest against the day—the inevitable day—that man fails. If I fear insignificance, I try to make myself significant. If I fear God, that holy fear will be seen in the investment of my time, my talents, my earthly possessions in His cause. Too often, we invest more in the comfort of our own house than in making the House of God attractive, more on our hobbies than on evangelism, more on personal beauty than on adorning the teaching about Christ. I am not the arbiter of your investment, but I am a voice reminding you of your responsibility to God.

What do you trust? Your own strength? Your standing in the community? Whom do you adore? Are you obsequious toward man that must die? Are you more concerned with how mankind sees you than you are with how God views you? What is truly valuable in your estimate? Is the commendation of God more important to you than are a few pieces of paper called stocks and bonds?

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<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon, op. cit., 374

If I will be wise, I will find my significance in God and not in what I possess. I will find my significance in serving God, and not in the estimate others may have of me. In this Psalm, **VERSES SEVEN THROUGH NINE** place matters in perspective and serve to caution us before we reach the end of days.

“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.”

[PSALM 49:7-9]

Who can pay the purchase price for my soul? Who can redeem my life? There are insufficient moneys to set me free from condemnation and to assure me of life. However, what no man can do, God has already done. What no man can provide, God has already provided. Life, the forgiveness of sin, freedom from condemnation before God, liberty to enter into His presence—all alike are offered through Christ the Lord. Listen to the Word of God. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

Should an individual die never having exercised faith toward God, that individual has no one to blame but himself. The warnings provided in the Word of God, the pleadings of the people of God, the opposition of our conscience—all alike are warning signs from a gracious God who seeks to turn us from our own deadly pursuits.

Throughout this Psalm, the psalmist has forced the reader to consider the true and eternal measure of life. What really matters in life? What is the true measure of greatness? The Psalm calls us to **Formulate a Proper View of Wealth and Power**. Wealth and power are transient. They are given for a brief period, and they are not an end in themselves; they are entrusted to us to be used for our good and for God’s glory.

Then, the Psalm counsels us to **Accept Wealth and Power as a Divine Stewardship**. Each of us shall give an answer to God. What shall we say concerning the goods we have handled? Will the latest toy we just had to have matter in eternity? Will the newest model of automobile actually make a difference in our service to God? Will my advancement at work, though it comes at the expense of service to Christ and to His church, really count in eternity?

Finally, the Psalm cautions us to **Understand that Life is Preparation for Death**. Are you ready for the inevitable? Have you made preparation for eternity? Are you saved? The plea of this preacher is that each one listening to this message today will discover the life that is freely offered in Christ Jesus as Lord. Be saved today.

How will your epitaph read? Will it speak of your wealth—wealth that will only mean that you enabled the government to waste yet more moneys and that others will enjoy what you left behind? Or will your epitaph speak of lives changed and God’s glory? The decision is yours. Choose wisely. Choose today. Amen.