

# GET RICH & DIE TRYIN'

PSALM 49 AUGUST 2, 2020

The America Pygmy Shrew is an interesting little animal. Just two inches long it reaches adulthood in about 18 days, which is good because the lifespan is less than a year and a half.<sup>1</sup> That time is spent in a constant search for food. You see, the pygmy shrew's heart beats 1,000 times a minute.<sup>2</sup> Its metabolism is so high that it must eat three times its weight every day. That means these shrews can never sleep for more than a few minutes because an hour without food could mean death.<sup>3</sup>

That kind of existence sounds *futile* to us. We wouldn't choose that sort of life for ourselves. Luckily, we don't have to devote our entire focus to finding food. Instead, we see life before us, the wheel in our hand, and we are free to choose which horizon we will press toward. But that freedom doesn't guarantee we will arrive at the destination of a meaningful life. God has gone to great lengths to warn us that there are many paths that will end in a ruined life, a wasted life, one with as little ultimate meaning as a pygmy shrew. A *worthless* life. That may sound harsh, but it's the truth. God, says this in 2 Kings 17: "They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves."

Mankind, in many places, has moved away from bowing before golden idols in the traditional pagan sense. But still there is a draw on the hearts of man to give himself over to other masters. So much human attention is devoted to gathering and managing wealth. Our culture is engrossed with money and richness and material gain. We want to know who has it. So, outlets like *Forbes* will tell us each year who has got the biggest pile. People talk about who *should* have it. So we have movements like *Occupy Wall Street* in 2011 or other groups railing against the "1%." Economists research pay gaps and our leaders debate minimum wage levels. When it comes to the voters, each election cycle many people cite "economic issues" as important, extremely important or the *most* important consideration in choosing who they want to represent them in the halls of government.

It's not all theoretical or political. It seems that, even before COVID, more and more people were becoming *less* likely to show generosity. In the year 2000, 2/3 of Americans donated to charity. In 2014 that number was down to 55%.<sup>4</sup>

Our popular culture embraces the pursuit of wealth. We concern ourselves with who is the highest paid actor or the best-selling musician. And your social media feeds are full of ads promising you a method by which you can make thousands of dollars from home doing no work!.

The culture's approach to wealth is like the pygmy shrew's approach to food, crystallized by the title of 50 Cent's debut album and then his first feature film: *Get rich or die tryin'*.

Don't worry, this isn't a study on giving. It's a study on *living*. Living a life of real meaning and value in a world that's absolutely fixated on all the wrong things. It's also an encouragement to us in a time when many people are feeling a pinch in their wallet and the potential anxiety that follows when the days are looking lean. We're reminded by God's word that if we make our lives about material pursuits, we may lay hold of some pile of treasure in the here and now, but in the end, if our purpose is to "get rich," then we will die trying.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_pygmy\\_shrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_pygmy_shrew)

<sup>2</sup> <http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/articles/2009/shrews.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.dw.com/globalideas/the-5-hungriest-animals/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://theconversation.com/fewer-americans-are-giving-money-to-charity-but-total-donations-are-at-record-levels-anyway-98291>

Psalm 49 is a song that drives home not only the proper mindset God wants us to have, but also reveals what great value He has placed on the the human treasure He bought with the blood of His Son. We begin above verse 1, where we read:

**Psalm 49:1-2 - For the choir director. A psalm of the sons of Korah. <sup>1</sup>Hear this, all you peoples; listen, all who inhabit the world, <sup>2</sup>both low and high, rich and poor together.**

There are some Psalms directed to Jews, some to pilgrims, some to kings. But *this* Psalm is for everyone everywhere. All who inhabit the world. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, slave or free. If you're alive, God has sung this song to you.

This is an important point, because it would be easy for us to think, "Well, I'm already a Christian." Or, "I'm not *rich*, at least not by my own definition. So what follows applies to the *next* person, but not to me." But the song *specifically* lumps us all together and says we *all* need to listen in.

It's also a great message considering current opinions. Today, there is a general idea that there are different rules for different people. On the one hand, the average man on the city street will probably say that the "rich" should be taxed at a much higher rate than the "poor." Different rules. On the other hand, it's evident that there are, in some ways, a different set of rules for those with great wealth in our society than for the average Joe.

But not so with the Lord. His truth does not apply to one group or the other, it applies to everyone. And, as His creatures, we are commanded to *listen* to what He says. God is a God of incredible patience and grace and understanding. But He has *spoken*. He has issued commands and instructions and decrees and guidance and it is not only our *duty* to hear Him, it's our only hope.

**Psalm 49:3-4 - <sup>3</sup>My mouth speaks wisdom; my heart's meditation brings understanding. <sup>4</sup>I turn my ear to a proverb; I explain my riddle with a lyre.**

The Psalmist is able to deliver this song because *he* listened to what the Lord had to say. Putting it to music he's now hope we will all hear and sing along.

This is what we might call a "wisdom" Psalm, and that emphasizes the fact that God's word is full of *wisdom*. It's not just the Good Book, it's a guide book. It's not just a set of stories, it is the scout which looks through the past, far to the future and *into* your heart, showing you the roads to take, the dangers to avoid and how to lay hold of everlasting life. It meets the hardest questions of life with real, applicable answers and shows how *you* can be known by the most important Person of all time.

Sadly, fewer and fewer people are going to the Word of God to drink of its truth. In its 10th annual "State of the Bible" survey, the American Bible Society found that fewer than 1 in 10 people "use the Bible daily."<sup>5</sup> CEO Robert Briggs said, "Despite nearly every individual in the U.S. having access to the Bible, engagement has decreased. That's been a consistent trend over the past few years, and the trend has *accelerated* since January 2020 throughout the pandemic." (Emphasis added)

That's not meant to burden you. It's an appeal. *Here* is help. *Here* is guidance. *Here* is perspective. *Here* is truth in the midst of the world's chaos. It's ready to be found as we sit and listen.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://news.americanbible.org/blog/entry/corporate-blog/american-bible-society-releases-10th-annual-state-of-the-bible-survey>

**Psalm 49:5 - <sup>5</sup>Why should I fear in times of trouble? The iniquity of my foes surrounds me.**

The singer is in on a secret and he wants us to be a part of it. The times were tough. The people in power were nipping at his heels. But he's not worried. He's calm and sure of what is true.

Remind yourself that there is nothing too difficult for our God to accomplish. This God defeats all enemies. This God can bring revival to Nineveh. This God can bring Nebuchadnezzar to repentance or stop the sun in the sky if He needs to. No day is too dark for Him to break through with His light. No trouble in your life is too much for Him to address.

**Psalm 49:6-9 - <sup>6</sup>They trust in their wealth and boast of their abundant riches. <sup>7</sup>Yet these cannot redeem a person or pay his ransom to God—<sup>8</sup>since the price of redeeming him is too costly, one should forever stop trying—<sup>9</sup>so that he may live forever and not see the Pit.**

Verse 8 is a parenthesis, so you read verse 7 right into verse 9. The difference on display in this Psalm is between those who trust in God for their lives and wellbeing and those who trust in their wealth. It's not just people who *worship* money, but we're also talking about those who hang their lives on material things. "My paycheck will protect me." But, for human beings, there's more going on than just the monthly bills that come in the mail. There is a life *after* this one and, standing before God, mankind owes an unpayable fine. Here on earth, a person might have enough assets to be comfortable and secure and meet all their needs. But at the end of life we owe a ransom debt to God. And there is no amount of money that can clear that debt. The price is too high.

In 2017, Leonardo DaVinci's *Salvator Mundi* sold at auction for \$450 million. But the most expensive item ever to be sold was a yacht called the *History Supreme*. It was made with 220,000 pounds of 24 carat gold. One of the walls in the master bedroom was made with meteoric stone. And it contains a sculpture made from an actual T-Rex bone. It sold for \$4.8 billion.<sup>6</sup>

Pick *any* human life. Pick even the most wasted life imaginable, from the worst place in the worst time. And the Lord says, "It's worth so much more than that." But, not only is our *value* that high in His eyes, our *debt* is that high as well. They say that Jeff Bezos' wealth grows by over \$2,000 a second.<sup>7</sup> But before God he is a pauper, powerless to pay for his sin.

We can't buy our way out of death. God can't be bribed or paid off. We can't *work* our way out of death either. We need someone to rescue us by paying the ransom. And we need it *now*, because death is waiting to claim every single person. It's estimated that every minute 120 people die.<sup>8</sup> And the Bible explains that after death comes judgment.<sup>9</sup>

So, before we continue, the question is: Are you ready to die? Remember, with all these thoughts on his mind, the Psalmist said, "I'm not afraid." How can that be? It's because his ransom had been paid. He knew the Redeemer. Do you? If you think you will stand before your Creator because you were a good person or because you worked hard in this life, listen to what's being said here. All the effort of your life isn't even worth half a cent on a trillion dollar invoice.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.autoevolution.com/news/the-curious-case-of-history-supreme-the-48-billion-yacht-made-of-solid-gold-141035.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-amazon-ceo-jeff-bezos-makes-every-day-hour-minute-2018-10>

<sup>8</sup> <https://bioethics.georgetown.edu/2016/04/death-rate-is-120-per-minute/>

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 9:27

There's a comical moment in the film *Catch Me If You Can*. Young Frank Abagnale has been forging checks and is being chased by the FBI. Frank's mom is questioned by the agents and she, not understanding the gravity of the situation, grabs her check book and says, "I've been working part time at the church. Tell me how much he owes and I'll pay you back." The response? "\$1.3 million."

Whatever direction we're sailing in life, all of us are on a crash course with death. The Psalmist drives the point home:

**Psalm 49:10-13 - <sup>10</sup> For one can see that the wise die; the foolish and stupid also pass away. Then they leave their wealth to others. <sup>11</sup> Their graves are their permanent homes, their dwellings from generation to generation, though they have named estates after themselves. <sup>12</sup> But despite his assets, mankind will not last; he is like the animals that perish. <sup>13</sup> This is the way of those who are arrogant, and of their followers, who approve of their words.**

Evolutionists suggest that we're animals, just like all the others. In a cosmic sense, we're not special, they say, just more evolved. That's not what verse 12 means. It simply means that we, like all the animals, are mortal. In fact, by highlighting this similarity, the truth that we are much *more* than just another animal is affirmed. A human life is of infinitely more value than the life of an animal because we were made in the image of God. The birds and the fish and the monkeys were not.

Now, when we started this song, we were promised wisdom and answers. We were being serenaded by someone who was living without fear or worry. But since then we've gotten a non-stop reminder that we'll all be dead soon. Not exactly the kind of DJ you'd book for your wedding.

But if the message is, "Everyone dies. There's nothing you can do to avoid it," then what's to stop us from giving up and saying, "Well then who cares? Might as well eat, drink and be merry."

The reveal comes in the next set of verses, where we find that, while everyone *will* die, there is *one* way for a person to pass *through* death into life. Every other way, every other plan, leads to death holding you hostage forever. But there is a way out, a way through, where death becomes a tunnel rather than a tomb.

**Psalm 49:14-15 - <sup>14</sup> Like sheep they are headed for Sheol; Death will shepherd them. The upright will rule over them in the morning, and their form will waste away in Sheol, far from their lofty abode. <sup>15</sup> But God will redeem me from the power of Sheol, for he will take me.**

These days people use the term "sheep" to deride their opponents. The truth is, the Bible has used this description for thousands of years, not in a derogatory way, but to show us our state. *We are* sheep. Helpless and in need of a shepherd. But, here's what's amazing about the way God has designed things: As sheep, we get to voluntarily side with one of two flocks, under one of two shepherds. There's the grim and cruel shepherd of death. He devours his sheep without mercy.

There's one other option: God's redemption. Of course, the most famous Psalm, Psalm 23 begins with those 5 wonderful words: The *Lord* is my Shepherd. When we are in *His* flock, we are saved from the power of death and He promises to walk with us through life, showing us tender care every day, and then to take us to Himself at the end of this life, where we will live forever with Him in glory.

Sheep, in the Bible's imagery, are free range animals. They're not in the tight pens we think of in today. We have freedom to go this way or that in life, seeking one pasture or another. In our natural

state, we're told that we are *all* sheep who have gone astray. We've each turned to our own way, leaving God's path to follow our own. In Psalm 119, the writer recognizes this and says:

**Psalm 119:176 - <sup>176</sup>I have wandered away like a lost sheep; come and find me**

That's exactly what God has done. He searches in all times, in all places, for His lost sheep. Pleading with them to surrender and become a part of His flock. God, through His Son Jesus Christ, did all that was necessary to pay the fine, to clear the debt, to redeem and rescue us from death. And "if you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."<sup>10</sup>

When a person stops trusting in wealth or their own efforts and instead gives their life to Jesus Christ, death is no longer a danger. It is a door through which we enter eternity with our Good Shepherd. The dark of death needs not frighten us, because salvation comes like the dawn.

The consequences of this choice could not be more clear or severe:

**1 Samuel 2:9 - <sup>9</sup>He will protect his faithful ones, but the wicked will disappear in darkness.**

**Job 20:25b-26 - The terrors of death are upon them. <sup>26</sup>Their treasures will be thrown into deepest darkness. A wildfire will devour their goods, consuming all they have left.**

There is no other savior than Jesus Christ. God says in Hosea 13: "You must acknowledge no God but Me, for there is no other Savior."

**Psalm 49:16-20 - <sup>16</sup>Do not be afraid when a person gets rich, when the wealth of his house increases. <sup>17</sup>For when he dies, he will take nothing at all; his wealth will not follow him down. <sup>18</sup>Though he blesses himself during his lifetime—and you are acclaimed when you do well for yourself—<sup>19</sup> he will go to the generation of his ancestors; they will never see the light. <sup>20</sup>Mankind, with his assets but without understanding, is like the animals that perish.**

The song turns to give us some comfort and guidance when it comes to the way we think about life. While there *are* powerful people out there who are using their wealth for evil, we are not to be afraid of them. Rather we should pity them and pray for them. We know the end of their story.

How might this give us some day-to-day application? Here's one: If you scroll through social media, you won't go long before there's some inflamed post about how Bill Gates is trying to kill us all. You know what? *Maybe he is!* But we don't have to be afraid of him or anyone else. We are being shepherded by the King of all heaven and earth. "In God I have put my trust, I will *not* be afraid. What can man do to me?"<sup>11</sup>

As the Psalm ends, it repeats what was already said in verse 12. But this time there's a small change: "Mankind with his assets *but without understanding*, is like the animals that perish."

This is important. Because the problem is not *having* assets. The issue is not the content of your bank account but the condition of your heart. What are you trusting in? Where is your hope?

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 10:9 (NLI)

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 56:11

It's easy for us to think, "Well, I'm a Christian, I'm not rich, so I'm good." But, remember how this song began: It's for everyone, everywhere, whether they're rich or poor. That means that there's a message here we *all* need to pay attention to. And, while everything is relative, even a person living on minimum wage in the United States is richer than 94% of the world's population.<sup>12</sup>

So, because of that and because of what has been revealed, because we know we are only alive on *this* side of eternity for a very short amount of time, as redeemed people we are to go and *redeem the time* that we do have. That means walking in God's wisdom and making the most of every opportunity.<sup>13</sup> Not to just make a buck, but to be about the Lord's business, proclaiming His message. It means learning to understand what the Lord wants you to do in your community and your area of influence. It means to live a life full of the Holy Spirit. In doing these things, we not only avoid the futility of a life spent pursuing wealth, but we actually lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven - great rewards that will be waiting for us.

Now, perhaps we think to ourselves, "I agree with God. He's my Shepherd. I'll honor Him. But can't I *also* point the prow of my life to building a fortune?" This Psalm and so many other passages would caution you, in as strong language as possible.

Listen: God is not against people having assets, in some cases even very *great* assets. If you're wealthy, thank God for it and use what you have for His glory. Imitate the generosity of your lavishly generous God. But we know that the *love* of money is a deadly trap. And, in the end, we can serve only one Master.

In 2 Kings, we have this description:

**2 Kings 17:33 - <sup>33</sup>They feared the Lord, but they also worshiped their own gods according to the practice of the nations**

The result was and always is disaster. Because: "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money."

All of us, rich or poor, are commanded by God to keep a proper perspective. To keep our eyes on the leading of our Shepherd, especially when we're worried about the condition of our pasture. We have no reason to fear, because look at what the Lord has done for us. Look at what He paid to make us His own. We can trust Him. We *must* trust Him, so that we can enjoy a life of *real* wealth, a life that lasts, a life on course for eternal peace, reward and glory.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://howrichami.givingwhatwecan.org/how-rich-am-i?income=27000&countryCode=USA&household%5Badults%5D=1&household%5Bchildren%5D=0>

<sup>13</sup> Colossians 4:5