lincolnberean

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SERIES: RETHINK (TIME/MONEY/COMMUNITY)
MESSAGE: THE FOOLISHNESS OF TRUSTING IN RICHES
PASSAGE: PSALM 49 (NASB)
SPEAKER: BRYAN CLARK

I want you to imagine this morning someone that in your mind pretty much has everything the world has to offer. So, whether that's somebody that's really rich or powerful or a celebrity, whoever that is for you. Then I want you to imagine that person standing in a Nebraska pasture next to a cow.

Here's the question: at the end of the day for both that person and the cow, in God's value system, which one accomplished more?

That's what we want to talk about.

If you have a Bible turn with us to Psalm 49.

Taking a couple weeks here as part of the rethink series. Last week, we talked about rethinking what we do with time. The danger of monotony, the danger of business, just missing the moments, the days that you can't ever get back. This morning we want to rethink what it is we ultimately live for. What is it we ultimately treasure in life?

Psalm 49 has a very interesting introduction. As a matter of fact, I'd say it's unlike any other introduction of any passage I know in the Bible. It's pretty over the top. You might say it's pretty audacious. If I was to open a sermon this way, you'd be like, I mean, I think that's a little over the top. But apparently what the Psalmist has to say must be really important. So, he opens here with this. If you think about a town crier going through the streets, this is what the town crier would say, "hear ye, hear, ye," like when the king is coming to town. Very much like the "behold" we looked at in the Christmas season, it's a way to say what I'm about to say is really important, make sure you listen.

> *1 Hear this, all peoples. Give ear, all inhabitants of the world.*

So, all peoples everywhere in the world. The idea of the inhabitants of the world, that Hebrew word translated world is actually a very rare word. It's not the typical word. It carries with it more kind of the nuance of time. So maybe you could translate inhabitants in the world right now. That's the idea. So, those that have lived before, their days are over. Those who are yet to come are not yet living, but as long as you can hear this message and have air in your lungs, you need to listen, because this is your moment to choose rightly.

> *2 Both low and high, rich and poor together.*

Doesn't matter if you lived in the ancient world or in the modern world. Doesn't matter if you're powerful or not powerful. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor. This message applies to all of us.

Verse three:

> *3 My mouth will speak wisdom. And the meditation of my heart will be understanding.*

Of course, the psalms are poetry, and the language, wisdom, and understanding. These are terms very common, especially in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom carries the idea of the ability to see with

discernment. I often refer to it as living skillfully. So, he's going to tell you what you need to understand in order to live life skillfully, second part of the verse, and the meditation of my heart will be understanding. In the language of the proverbs, wisdom is the ability to see it with discernment, understanding is how to implement into life, to understand it, and then actually live it out.

Verse four:

> *4 I will incline my ear to a proverb;*

In other words, he's going to take this message that sounds like it's so very important and distill it down into something as simple as a little proverb, so that we make sure we don't miss it.

End of verse four:

> *4 I will express my riddle on the harp.*

Basically, I will answer, I will solve this riddle by writing a little lyric put to music. So, essentially what he's saying is, I am going to unveil for you the mystery of life, what ultimately matters, what gives life meaning. And I'm going to state it so simply it's like in a little proverb or in a little jingle so you don't forget it.

So, that's a rather large introduction. All people, everywhere, in all times. This was written 3000 years ago. Yet whatever it is, is just as necessary to hear today as it was 3000 years ago.

Verse five:

> *5 Why should I fear in days of adversity, When the iniquity of my foes surrounds me, 6 even those who trust in their wealth and boast in the abundance of their riches?*

So, the word translated fear is a common Hebrew word, Proverbs opens when it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It's the same word. It has two nuances to it. One is actually to be afraid. One of the realities of living in a broken world that has been true since the beginning of time, there's always going to be the haves and the have nots. And the haves are always going to oppress the have-nots. It's true, and every culture always has been ever since the beginning of time. So, part of this is literally being afraid of those who can oppress you.

But the word fear also has this nuance and probably more so here of this idea of being overly impressed. The Hebrew word is literally a compound word that means “overly in awe.” So, it's talking about someone who is overly impressed with someone that apparently has what this person wants.

Verse six:

> *6 those who trust in their wealth, and boast in the abundance of their wealth.*

So, there's two parts to that. Those who have often trust in what they have. So, that becomes their source of security. They also boast in their wealth, which means this becomes the basis of their significance. As long as that's true, that's what I will live for.

If I think money and stuff is the basis of my security, the basis of my significance, that is what's going to define my life.

So, let's be really clear what we're saying and not saying. First of all, it's really important to understand. This is not an indictment about those who have riches, those who have wealth. There's nowhere where the Bible condemns that. As a matter of fact, many of the main characters of faith in the Old Testament were very wealthy and God made them wealthy. The proverb says that when the righteous prosper, the city rejoices. So, it doesn't have anything to do with that.

Remember, the introduction was rich and poor. High and low. But here's what it's saying. That in any culture, anywhere in the world, at any time, there's always going to be the haves and the have nots. It's always gonna be part of it. Those that have, have the temptation to find their security and significance in what they have. Those that have not, wish they had. Because if they had, that would be their security and significance. So, it's really not an issue whether you're rich or poor. Doesn't really matter where you land on that scale. It's more a matter of understanding what does and does not ultimately matter. That's what he's saying.

Verse seven:

> *7 No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him—*

Now I'm going to skip to verse nine:

> *9 That he should live on eternally, that he should not undergo decay.*

If you notice in your text, there's a hyphen or parentheses that separate out verse eight. Because it's parenthetical. So, it makes the most sense if you read seven and nine to understand what he's saying, then we'll go back to verse eight.

So verse seven, he uses two financial terms. No man can, by any means, redeem his brother, means to buy him back from where? Verse nine, from the grave. From Sheol. In other words, a big emphasis in this psalm is everybody has a limited number of days, then you die. And there's nothing you can do about that. Nobody has so much money they can redeem a brother or themselves from the grave. It doesn't work that way.

The second phrase or word, the bottom of verse seven, or give to God a ransom. That's also a financial term. It's an amount of money that's paid to somehow set someone free. Free from what? Free from the grave. The grave is holding them hostage. Does someone have enough money to pay the ransom, to get out of the grave? Answer is, no.

End of verse nine, that he should live on eternally, that he should not undergo decay. Now verse eight. Parenthetically, why is this true?

> *8 For the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease trying forever—*

One of the challenges for those who have more is there's a tendency to think money can solve every problem. What's interesting about verse eight when it says the redemption of his soul. Without getting in to the grammatical weeds on that, the word soul here is not referring to the immaterial part of us. It's rather a word that captures basically the summary, the sum total of my life. She's exactly the same way in verse 15. So, what he's saying is, I cannot live my life the way I want; find my trust and my significance, my security, in myself; live for the values of this world, and ultimately, when I die, somehow redeem my life, so that that mistake is corrected. There's a tendency to think when I get to the other side, somehow, if I have enough money, I can fix that.

You have it in the story of the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus tells in Luke 16. The rich man dies, but he thinks even after he's died, he's still rich. He can still boss people around. He can still tell people what to do. The psalm is reflecting the idea that the human life, the human soul, that sum total of my life, is way too valuable to somehow be purchased with something that's as worthless as money. That's the idea there.

Verse ten:

> *10 For he sees that even wise men die; the stupid and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others.*

So, the person that is being described notices the wise, the stupid, the reckless, the careful, they all die. So, obviously, at some point, I get to the end of my story. The thought then is somehow, if I have enough, I can redeem my life back, even though I've wasted it. At the end of verse ten, the reality is they leave their wealth to others. Nobody takes it with them.

I've mentioned before a few times Patty and I have taken a motorcycle ride from here to the Black Hills. A motorcycle ride through the Black Hills is absolutely glorious, but that is for another day. But there's a reality to a motorcycle trip. You have a limited amount of space. So, you have to really think about what you're going to take that fit in those little bags. But there's also a reality when you go, especially to a touristy place like the Black Hills, there's no sense in buying a bunch of stuff because you have no way to get it home. You can't take it with you. Imagine spending a lot of money to accumulate a lot of stuff, only to have to leave it in the parking lot. Because you can't take it with you. You'd say, that would be really dumb. Yes, it would be, and that is the point. What is the point of spending our lives accumulating stuff that ultimately we have to leave in the parking lot and can't take it with us?

Verse eleven, the Psalmist is trying to figure out the rationale. Why would anyone live that way?

> *11 Their inner thought is that their houses are forever and their dwelling places to all generations; they have called their lands after their own names.*

So, the psalmist is trying to get in the heads of people that live that way. And the only conclusion is they must think their house lasts forever. Their stuff lasts forever. That somehow they don't leave it behind. Why else would they spend the one life they've been given on things that have to be left behind?

The idea at the end of verse eleven, they have called their lands after their own names. In the ancient world, it was not uncommon if someone had accumulated a significant amount of wealth, they would name a piece of ground or a city after themselves. It was their way of trying to achieve a level of immortality. As long as their name is on that place or that city, then people will remember them. They will matter forever. So, I buy a piece of ground, I name it after myself, I invite everyone to take "the last train to Clarksville." If you're my age, you know what that's referring to.

Every day, pretty much—Patty and I live about 20 miles south—we drive through the town of Hickman. Hickman's a lovely town, and over the last decade, it has grown dramatically, and we have quite a few families that live there. But Hickman has an interesting history on its name. The city was actually founded by the Reverend C. H. Heckman with an "e." And that's what the town was called, but when they were filing the last paperwork, to make it official, there was a clerical error. And it was spelled Hickman. To which, ever since, it has been the town of Hickman. Imagine you think this is what's gonna create my legacy. I will matter forever, and then for crying out loud, they misspell it, and it's called Hickman ever since.

My name is Bryan. I was born in Bryan Hospital. I've always been thankful I wasn't born at St. Elizabeth, that'd be an awkward name to carry with you through life. But when you talk to most people, they don't even know who it's named after. It's probably named after me. No, it actually isn't, it's named after William Jennings Bryan. If you say that to people today, most people will say, I don't know who that is. Who is that? Did he do something? It just doesn't work. Nobody's impressed. You can't take it with you.

Verse twelve:

12 but man in his pomp

Pomp is the translation of a Hebrew word that basically just means self-glory. Everything people are doing, to try to be significant, to find security, to try to show the world that I matter.

12 But man in his pomp will not endure;

That word endure is an interesting Hebrew word. It literally means to "make it through the night." So, it's created an imagery that life is like living in the daytime. You go to bed and that is death. And ultimately, all your significance, all your value, all your stuff, everything you lived for doesn't even endure the night. By the time you get up the next morning, none of that matters. You can't take it with you.

12 But man in his pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

It's a very interesting line. Ultimately, when it's all said and done, if that's what someone has lived for, in God's value system, when they wake up on the other side, what they have lived for accomplishes as much as a cow grazing in a pasture. A life completely wasted.

Verse thirteen:

13 This is the way of those who are foolish,

By now, that should be pretty obvious. That's a foolish way to live.

13 and of those after them, who approve their words.

In other words, this is the prevailing value system of the culture, of every culture around the world, since the beginning of time. This is nothing new. But what verse thirteen is saying, is this foolish? For those who have and those who wish they have, at the end of the day that describes a high percentage of people. Then you get to that little Hebrew word, *Selah*, which basically just means, "let's stop, let's think about that for a minute."

Several years ago, I was at a Generous Giving conference, and one of the speakers was sharing his own life story, aguy by the name of Mike. Mike had been very successful in life. At the time, it was worth several billion dollars. He told the story of an occasion where his daughter was in the hospital with what they thought was a fatal disease and going to die. And in that moment, he realized everything he'd given his life to had no value in that moment. There was nothing his money could do to make the disease go away. And he recognized this is not the way to live. It was a pivotal moment where he turned his attention to Jesus, to God, things that will last, and completely changed the trajectory of his life.

It was about that same time period that I was part of a pastor's group that met in Dallas, Texas. There were about 20 of us. We met twice a year. It was with an organization that was put together by a guy named Bob Buford. Bob Buford owned a whole network of TV stations in the South. I think when he personally met with us, he was worth about $120 million. He told his own story, how he had lived for money and stuff. One day, his son and a friend of his son, they were 24 years old, his friend and his son, decided to see if they could swim the Rio Grande River. Bob got the phone call, "your son is missing." He said immediately he sent up helicopters, planes, rescue people, everything that money could buy. But the reality was his son had drowned in the river and was dead. And he came to this sobering recognition, that in that moment, his money could accomplish nothing. Money will not bring your son back from the dead. It will not make the disease go away.

Money is necessary. You have to have money to live. You have to pay your bills. But it's helpful to realize beyond that, it has no real value. It can't make you happy. It can't satisfy your life. It doesn't make you significant. It can't be your security. It doesn't make the cancer go away. It doesn't make the disease go away. It doesn't make the addiction go away. It can't fix a failing marriage. It can't bring back a rebellious child. At the end of the day, it really can't do much. And it's foolish to think that is ultimately my significance and my security.

Verse fourteen:

> *14 As sheep, they're appointed for Sheol;*

Which means the grave.

> *14 death shall be their shepherd;*

The second part of verse fourteen literally could be translated death, death shall graze upon them. So, basically, it's a picture of sheep standing out in a green, lush pasture, thinking they have it made, but have no idea they're actually just being fattened for the slaughter. Death is grazing on them, preparing to finish the job. It's a very vivid imagery.

Second part of verse fourteen:

> *14 And the upright shall rule over them in the morning, and their form shall be for Sheol to consume so that they have no habitation.*

No mansion. The line in verse fourteen that I love is right in the middle, "and the upright show rule over them in the morning." You see this again in the proverb of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man, even after he dies, thinks he's still rich. Somehow he can pull this out. But ultimately, it's Lazarus, the poor man, who on the other side is in Abraham's bosom. It's the idea contrasting those that will not endure through the night. Whatever you've accumulated in life, will not make it to the other side. But what will matter in the morning is those that have pursued righteousness, those who have walked uprightly, in the words of Jesus, those who have made a decision to seek first the kingdom of God, to ultimately live this one life for the things that matter.

What I love about that is there is a reality that for a majority of us that walk through these doors this weekend, we stand no real chance of being rich, of being famous, of being a celebrity, of being really powerful. It's just not gonna happen. But every single one of us, old, young, rich, poor, has an equal opportunity to walk uprightly. To seek first the kingdom of God. To live for what ultimately matters. It doesn't matter where you land on that economic scale. Every single one of us has an equal chance to live for what really matters.

Verse fifteen:

> *15 but God will redeem [financial term] my soul from the power of Sheol [the power of the grave], for he will receive me.*

The word soul there is used exactly the same way it's used in verse eight, and the idea is it's parallel with the word "me." He will receive me, which confirms this idea, that it's not talking about our immaterial self, rather, it's talking about the whole of my life and how I've lived my life. There is no amount of money, according to verse eight, that can redeem a human life. A life wasted is a life wasted. But in verse fifteen, God has the power to redeem a life. A life lived for the things that matter, to redeem, to buy back, for those things to matter forever.

The end of the verse where it says, "he will receive me." It's the exact same word used of Enoch in the story in Genesis. If you're not familiar, in the book of Genesis there's a guy by the name of Enoch. Enoch is one of the few people in the Bible that never died. At some point, God just took him. That's the word, it's the same word here. That at the end of the story, what money cannot do, God can do. With the salvation he offers, with the power of redemption, can use my life such as it is, in such a way that after I die, he redeems it back, ultimately, for the things that will matter forever. When my time comes, he will redeem me, he will take me home. And I will know I lived for what, well, ultimately matters.

Verse sixteen:

> *16 Do not be afraid*

There's our word again. Don't be overly impressed.

> *16 when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; 17 for when he dies, he will carry nothing away; his glory will not descend after him.*

Verse eighteen is the problem.

> *18 Though while he lives, he congratulates himself—and though men praise you when you do well for yourself—19 he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they will never see the light.*

Verse eighteen is the problem. This is the culture we live in. We have a culture that admires and worships those who are celebrities, those who are famous, those who have money, those who have power. In the eyes of our culture, this is what matters. This is the way to find happiness. This is the way to find security. This is the way to find significance. If you choose a different path, to live for the things that ultimately matter to God. Don't expect the people around you to be impressed. They're not impressed. That's not what they value. Nobody's gonna applaud. The cameras are not gonna gather around your front door like the paparazzi, because you are somebody. Go back to your class reunion. If you have spent your life seeking first the kingdom of God, nobody's gonna be applauding. Nobody's gonna be impressed. They're impressed by money, by fame, by stuff. That just the way it is, and that's the danger of thinking that's what really matters. Which is a good way to waste a life. Eventually that applause becomes so loud, they no longer hear the words of the psalmist. And that's what he says. Ultimately, they never see the light.

Verse twenty:

> *20 Man in his pomp [self-glory], yet without understanding, is like the beasts that perish.*

So, there's this little proverb. He's going to say it one more time. Those that live their lives, for money and stuff, for fame, for celebrity, for power, at the end of the day cannot take any of that with them. And ultimately, what they've accomplished in life will be no different than a cow grazing in a pasture. It's just a poetic way of saying a life completely wasted.

So, I know this weekend there's gonna be many, many people in this auditorium, they know this. They believe this. They live this. And I hope for you this is just encouragement. I hope you walk out the door with a smile on your face knowing this is how I live my life, this is what matters to me, this is who I am. And even though it's way out of step with the culture, this is true. You just want you to be encouraged to know you're on the right track, that is what's going to matter. Stay the course.

There's others that maybe need to rethink some things. It's easy to get caught up in the world's value system and find yourself giving this one life you have to the things that ultimately won't matter. They may impress others now, but they won't ultimately matter.

I received an email this week from a friend of mine. He and his wife have been part of Lincoln Berean as long as I've been here. They've both been very committed. They've been involved in multiple ways. They've been wonderful encouragers to me. They have clearly lived their life on mission. They do a wonderful job of living out what the psalm is talking about. On Wednesday, New Year's Eve, this is what the email said:

> *Brian, as you may have heard, I have lung cancer that has spread to my lymph nodes and most likely beyond.*

That's the opening of the email. Over the next few lines, he describes what's next, and hopefully, has many more years. But right now, it doesn't look very positive. Then he wrote this line:

> *I am totally at peace. I am at rest. Full of contentment, and joy, and love. God is with me every moment—is in me, and I in him, abiding in him.*

This is the fruit of a life well lived. He's 81 years old. Maybe this is the finish line. But he has a deep sense of peace and satisfaction in knowing, I have one life. I'm getting to the end of it. And I know I've lived for the things that matter. Is it peace? He knows God will redeem his life. He's ready for God to take him home.

That's what I would want for all of us. I don't want any of us to get to the end of our story and realize you only have one shot at life and I wasted it on things that ultimately don't matter.

Our Father, we're thankful that you love us enough to tell us the truth. To tell all people of all time, anywhere in the world, what it is that gives us security what it is that gives us significance. What it is that really matters. Lord, every day is the day we don't get back. May we live it for the things that ultimately matter to you in Jesus's name. Amen.