

A Guiding Grave

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 August 2025

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] But what we're going to do now is just move to turn our attention to God's words. So if you have a Bible, please turn with me to Psalm 49. Just eyes in for a minute.

Here's what I want you to say to yourself deep down. That what I'm about to hear over the next 30 minutes or so really could transform my life. Not because I'm saying it.

Friends, I don't have an awful lot to offer this morning. But because it's God's word. And we should come expectantly to him as we come to his word. Knowing that he is the living God.

He is in the business of transforming lives through the person of his son, Jesus Christ. So on that note, let's pray. And let's ask that God would do that this morning as we come to his word. Father, we thank you that your word is living and active.

It's sharper than a double-edged sword. Piercing. Testing. Rebuking. Encouraging. And Father, we pray that as we turn here now. And as we see just how timely and how relevant what we're about to read together is for our lives.

[1 : 35] This everyday reality that we know. Father, I pray that you would lift our eyes to the greater vision. The greater story. The greater truth of the risen Jesus. Father, pray particularly for those this morning who are weary.

Maybe we're doubting. Maybe we're tired. Maybe we don't even know what we think we know. Father, would we leave here with a greater understanding of Jesus, we pray. In his name we ask.

Amen. So folks, Psalm 49. Just to get us going this morning, let me tell you about a graveyard that's opposite our house.

During that COVID season of life, do you remember the one when we were allowed outside for one hour a day? Do you remember that? That's scary when you think back on that, isn't it?

One hour a day we were allowed outside. Well, during that season when it was my turn to take the kids for a bit, give Alex a little break when I was working and she was looking after them and we'd kind of do this tag team thing.

[2 : 38] With my hour, I always used to take our kids to the graveyard. Know how to show my kids a good time, right? On what I like to call quite literally was the graveyard shift. That's what I had.

And because we did the same routine day after day after day after day, I got to know every hiding spot in that graveyard for hide and seek. I got to know how the tracks worked when the kids used to ride their bikes.

But I used to read every single inscription on the tombstones in that graveyard just to pass the time. You know the kind we get, don't we? The kind that tell us who this person was, where they were born, what did they do, who they were related to.

Read every single one of these tombstones in this graveyard, Libertankirk. And here's what I saw. Some people are buried under massive tombstones.

Uber impressive. And the inscription written on it makes for pretty impressive reading. Who this person was. They did tons of things with their life.

[3 : 43] They were clearly either from money or they had money because this thing is absolutely vast. And that's one side of the graveyard. But you just walk two minutes in the other direction.

There are people buried underneath what can only be described as a small slate of marble. With barely anything written about them other than their name.

And yet when all is said and done, whether you're high, whether you're low, whether you're rich, whether you're poor, it's the same graveyard.

And it reminded me of that song. If you've ever seen it, Hamilton the musical. If you haven't, then Disney Plus three-month trial, knock yourself out.

Okay, you'll find it. Here's this song in Hamilton the musical. It says, death doesn't discriminate between the sinners and the saints. It takes and it takes and it takes.

[4 : 41] And we keep on living anyway. You know the one? Hamilton. And it's true, isn't it? True. Unless your faith is in Jesus.

Friends, that is the reality that we're looking at. See, in our world today, unless you have a reason to go there or it's Halloween or you've been watching Michael Jackson thriller video, whatever, we tend to avoid graveyards.

They're a bit creepy. They're a bit morbid. Why would you want to go there? And yet God is going to tell us in Psalm 49 that there is timeless wisdom about life to be learned in a graveyard.

Here's the thing of this psalm. Which grave is going to be your guide? If you have Psalm 49 open there, just before we read it, notice at verse one, notice who the target audience is of the psalm.

Do you see it? This is not just the psalmist's top tips. Or his religious insights for God's people. This is an announcement, do you see, for all peoples.

[5 : 49] All who live in this world. Both low and high, rich and poor. Now, do you know what that word all does? It's a really technical Hebrew word. Try and get it for you. That word all here just means all.

The net catches absolutely everybody. Which means whoever you are here today, whatever you think about the God of the Bible. Maybe a friend has dragged you along. Maybe you've got wrong direction on Google Maps and you've ended up here.

You think, what am I doing here? Friends, this one's for you. That word all means this one's for you. It means absolutely every one of us is in on what this psalm is trying to tell us.

So this is something, you can just track with a language, that the psalmist has meditated on. Now, that word in the Bible just means to chew something over.

It's kind of what cows do, isn't it? They just chew. They chew the cud. That's what this word means. It's totally different from Eastern meditation where you empty your mind.

[6 : 50] When the Bible talks about meditation, it's a different thing. Christian meditation is about filling your mind with God's word and allowing God's word to direct and shape your life. So this is wisdom in Psalm 49 of someone who's got a few rings on the tree of his life.

Who's been around the block a few times. Someone for whom this is not their first rodeo. And they've weighed it all up. They've looked at life. They've experienced a few things.

And here is what they've concluded about life in this psalm. You ready for it? What's the wisdom here? Let's read it together. Come with me. Psalm 49 for the director of music of the Sons of Korah.

This has been a wee run of these psalms from these temple musicians. A psalm. Hear this, all you peoples. Listen.

All who live in this world, both low and high, rich and poor alike. My mouth will speak words of wisdom. The meditation of my heart will give you understanding.

[8 : 00] I will turn my ear to a proverb. With the harp I will expound my riddle. Why should I fear when evil days come?

When wicked deceivers surround me. Those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches. No one can redeem the life of another.

Or give to God. Or give to God a ransom for them. The ransom for a life is costly. No payment is ever enough. So that they should live on forever.

So that they should live on forever and not see decay. For all can see that the wise die. That the foolish and the senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others.

Their tombs will remain. Their houses forever. Their dwellings for endless generations. Though they'd named lands after themselves.

[8 : 58] People, despite their wealth, do not endure. They're like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves and of their followers who approve their sayings.

They're like sheep that are destined to die. Death will be their shepherd. But the upright will prevail over them in the morning. Their forms will decay in the grave far from their princely mansions.

But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead. He will surely take me to himself. Do not be overawed when others grow rich.

When a splendor of their houses increases. For they will take nothing with them when they die. Their splendor will not descend with them. Though while they live, they count themselves blessed.

And people praise you when you prosper. They will join those who've gone before them. They will never again see the light of life. People who have wealth.

[10 : 04] But lack understanding. Are like the beasts that perish. And God will bless the reading of his word to us this morning.

Folks, this is a worldview shaping text. Here's what I mean by that. You and I, we default to slip into viewing and evaluating the world and the people in it and the so-called wisdom in it.

And where real power and truth lies. We default to doing it one way. And here is God in this psalm saying to us, to anyone who would listen.

I want you to view it another way. I want you to view it my way. And so this is a psalm. It's all about fear.

Do you see that? Verse 5. Rhetorical question. Why should I fear when evil days come? When those who trust in their wealth and are boasting in it, they surround me.

[11 : 10] I think wealth in the psalmist's world goes hand in hand with power. And people using wealth to get power and using that power to gain influence and using that influence to prosper.

And all the while without any consideration of and actually outright hostility towards the creator God of the cosmos. And that's a really hard thing to get your head around when you see it happening.

Remember that famous saying from Benjamin Franklin, that the only certainties in life are death and taxes. You know that phrase?

That saying? Do you know what my few years working in the corporate world before I started doing this made me see that that's a half truth? Because nowadays, see if you've got enough money, you can pay someone to set up a scheme for you in somewhere like the Cayman Islands.

So that you don't actually have to pay taxes. So death and taxes, certainties, I'm not so sure. But just to bring this closer to home, if you're a Christian here today, here's what the psalmist wants us to think about as we seek to apply this to our lives.

[12 : 24] Ready for this? Here's the question. Who are the people that you and I find it hardest to be openly Christian around? You want that again?

Who are the people in our lives that we find openly, hardest, sorry, to be openly Christian around? Think on it. I've got people in my head.

Maybe it's your colleagues. Maybe it's your roommates in halls. Maybe it's your brother, your sister, your parents. Honestly, I find it really perplexing watching people who I rub shoulders with every day ignore God.

And yet they seem to get on perfectly well and get ahead in life. And of course, that's to do with God's grace, isn't it? His common grace to us all. But when they just do not acknowledge it or see it. When that happens, friends, when that happens in our lives, what are we so often tempted to think?

I know my own heart in this, is if you can't beat them, join them. Yeah? Maybe they know something that we don't. Do good guys really finish last?

[13 : 32] Maybe God has met his match. Maybe you can have your cake and eat it. Do you find that? Friends, the ambition of the psalm comes at verse 16.

Have a look at it. The psalmist's ambition, his drive, the reason he's writing this. And I imagine God's people are in his mind here. He says, do not be overawed.

And that word just means intimidated. When others grow rich, do not be shaken by that. Do not doubt when that happens. When the splendor of their houses increase. Right?

When they upsize. When they move out to the suburbs. And it's a five bedroom house with two cars in the garage. Kids at private school. And you think, I'm just struggling here.

Trying to be faithful to God. What's happening? Friends, he's saying, don't be intimidated. Don't be overawed. And here's two quickfire reasons why. And of course, this is all about being faithful to God.

[14 : 32] About loving him. About cherishing him. About having him number one in our lives. Here's two quickfire reasons why. Why we shouldn't be overawed. Here's the first one. Because there are some things in life that money can't buy.

Do you see verse seven? This isn't. Guys, I've got a theory. Right? Can I bounce something off you and see if it's just me?

See what the psalmist says at verse 10. He says what? Do you see it? All can see it. So this isn't hidden. This is a truth that's out there.

This psalmist is like the little boy in the emperor's new clothes. Looking at the emperor saying, am I the only one who can see this? Verse seven. And no one can redeem the life of another or give God a ransom for them.

There's a truth. Meaning that you can't barter with God. Our creator doesn't take credit card. You can't do a deal with death.

[15 : 37] Doesn't matter how rich you are. And of course, it's what people around the world are trying to do with all their billions and billions of money. Investing in technology, which means that they're going to be able to freeze themselves so that they can kind of cheat death.

But of course, you can't cheat death. You might be able to delay it. But you can't defy it. There's verse 11. There is a finality about death.

Even to those who had enough power and influence to name lands after themselves. And we still get that today, don't we? Great conversation starter for you over lunch. How many places can you think of named after people who are now dead?

Right? A wee shot of this. Stalingrad. Alexandria. Darwin. You can call it there and you can do some more if you want. People who named lands after themselves.

Who had all that influence and power. Yet even people with that level of influence. Verse 13. Their fate. Which means they end. It's the same as everybody else.

[16 : 43] And notice the psalmist here. Millennia ahead of Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg. And the days of liking and retweeting and sharing. What does he say? He says they will be.

As will be the one of all their followers. They too will exit life stage as naked. As the day they entered it.

And you can't argue with them stats. Why shouldn't we fear those with power and influence and wealth. And using that wealth to live an anti-God life.

Well firstly because there's some things that money can't buy. Secondly because there's some places that money can't go. And there's two angles in this. Do you see the first one?

Look at it verse 17. You can't take a penny with you. That's what the psalmist is saying. You cannot take a penny of that with you.

[17 : 42] Remember when we lived in Malawi for a season before we moved to Edinburgh. The president at the time was a man by the surname of Bingu. And he was related to Robert Mugabe.

It gives you a clue as to what was going on in his presidency. And what he'd done when we got there. We realised that he'd artificially set the exchange rate. The local exchange rate to dollars really high.

To try and improve public perception of what that national currency was worth. See the instant that he died. When we were there it happened. When he died. Within days the value of that currency had dropped dramatically.

The first time I'd ever experienced anything like that in my life. Local people devastated. Savings halved. Taking a hit. Suddenly everything is now more expensive.

It's just how fragile money is. But know that there's coming a day. Says the psalmist. It's far scarier than that. For every single person. When in an instant.

[18 : 44] Your net worth will be zero. Everything that you've built. And ploughed your life into. Will be gone. And add to that verse 10. The fact that this could be a double whammy. Do you see verse 10?

Because they will leave their wealth to others. And you've no idea. What kind of person will pick it up. He will be in line to inherit it. Always have a laugh.

If you've ever watched. Made in Chelsea when that came out. And there was that guy that inherited the McVitie's fortune. Wasn't it? And I love the thought of the guy who gave him the money. The McVitie's owner.

Thinking. Wouldn't it be great if my son. The person who inherited this money. Was on a reality TV show. Where they drank coffees and cocktails every day. Because that's what I'm working for. They will leave their wealth to others.

And you've no idea who's picking it up after you. And it's summed up at verse 12. The wisdom of this psalm. With the similar words that end this psalm. At verse 20.

[19 : 45] Do you see it? People who have wealth. But lack understanding. Are like the beasts that perish. And just in case you're tempted to think.

That the psalmist is maybe having one of those. Those days. Maybe the psalmist is just hangry. Maybe the psalmist just needs to take a moment for himself.

Have a wee Kit Kat. A time out. And just go and go for a walk. Something like that. Friends. You turn to the gospels. And you found Jesus saying something strikingly similar.

To what the psalmist is saying here. Luke chapter 12. Jesus tells the story about a farmer. A rich farmer.

Who one day decides. After a bumper harvest. That he wants to build bigger barns for himself. So that he can store more grain. So that he can retire early.

[20 : 40] And take it easy. And that's a remarkably modern ambition. Is it not? If you're a daytime TV fan. You'll know those shows that are popular around 3, 4 o'clock on the telly at that time.

Escape to the country. A place in the sun. Here's the narrative of those shows. Make your money. Retire to luxury. Open a little bit of the bubbly.

Take and post the selfie. And soak it up. Yeah? Say it again. Because I quite like that. Make your money. Retire to luxury. Open the bubbly. Take the selfie.

Soak it up. That's the narrative to those shows. And we applaud those people. Living the dream. That's what we say. Living the dream. And the presenters of those shows would be desperate to get the number of the farmer in Jesus' story to do a feature on him.

Desperate. Can you connect us? Desperate. To get the thinking. How did he do it? How did he get to where he's got to? His retirement plans to retire for luxury.

[21 : 48] And why? Well, the world stands up and applauds and says, well played, sir. Well played. Give him the book deal. Well. Jesus says, in the twist and the sting of that parable, Jesus says, you fool.

Tonight your life is going to be demanded of you. So true is it. I remember having a geography teacher at school. Gotten really well with this geography teacher. Always told us about his plans to retire and just do Monroe's.

On his boat. Right? That was a Deacon Blue song, Dignity. That was what he wanted to do. Sail up the West Coast.

And he died two weeks after he retired. Friends, you've got no idea. No idea whether you're a footballer driving a Lamborghini trying to make it back for training at Liverpool preseason.

Life is gone. You have no idea. I have no idea. This isn't a dig it. Planning and forward thinking from Jesus. Get that right. It is a merciful warning about acting as if life will go on forever and you are the master of your own destiny.

[22 : 59] And Jesus says, you fool. Maybe that's you today. I don't know. If it is, can I just try and put the record straight? Know that when you hear that, it's not God on your case.

It's not God like the football referee trying to spoil your fun. Can we take it to VAR? Okay? If God's stopping you in your tracks this morning, know that it is his mercy to you.

Life is a lot more liberating and enjoyable when we collapse into the arms of a capable and all-sufficient Jesus. And embrace the creature-creator distinction.

The very essence of sin where so many of our problems in life come from in our burnout culture is that we act and live as if it's the other way around.

Of course, what did God do when he created the world? He longed to fill it with his glory. As the waters cover the sea, his ambition to fill it with his glory.

[24 : 04] And to fill it with creatures made in his image who display his glory. And how are we going to do that? Creatures who know that he is the creator and we are the loving, dependent, worshipful creature.

If that's you this morning, if God is bringing you back to that place, know that it is his mercy. But know first and foremost that you are going with the grain of your creator's design.

I know many of you starting here, you're just about to start out in jobs. Remember that. Grad job going to take the world by storm. Friends, you don't need to do that. Our diaries and our plans can make atheists of us all, can't they?

Jesus says, do you know what you need to worry about? Do you know what your first priority is each and every day?

To love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbours yourself. The sting of that parable is, don't be rich towards yourself. Be rich towards God.

[25 : 06] And that's a gracious invitation to come to him, the author of life, and find both meaning and purpose. You know, human nature is like a book, isn't it?

We are anchored beings. We are created with purpose that we don't invent, but purpose with that which we discover.

Jesus says, come to me and find it. In our world that is drowning in information, but light on wisdom, know that Jesus is an able, willing and qualified teacher.

He is the very living embodiment of wisdom. And there's echoes of that in the defiantly triumphant note of verse 15 of Psalm 49.

But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead. Given everything that he's just wax lyrical about. But the finality of death, you can't take it with you. You can't beat it.

[26 : 18] He says, but God will redeem me from the realm of the dead. He will surely take me to himself. Notice the personal pronouns. Now, how can the psalmist say that is the question. I take it the psalmist can say it by faith.

That God will make a way for me to see life with him after death. God will take me to himself. Friends, we can know that truth in 3D this morning.

We can take it in. And we can know it and we can live in light of it when we take in the person and work of Jesus. You see, Jesus isn't just the preacher of wisdom.

He's the savior who knows the light of life. Now, the psalmist is right. If you look at it there, the ransom for a life is costly. Totally. Agreed.

But the wonderful news of Christianity is that Jesus lived the perfect God-honoring life. The one that we should have lived but we couldn't live.

[27 : 26] Meaning that he is the only one who deserves to inherit and is worthy of living forever. And that makes him the only one qualified to be that perfect sacrifice and pay that price.

Probably more accurate to say be that price through his shed blood on the cross in our place for our sin. Friends, how often we sing of how amazing grace is without any embedded repentance.

Let's say it again. How often we sing of how amazing grace is without any embedded repentance. In other words, grace might be free. But it ain't cheap.

My real sin put a real man on a real cross in real history. It's not cheap. You don't know Jesus in verse 14.

The reality of it says the psalmist says that death is your shepherd. However, if your faith and trust is in this Jesus today, the wonderful personal and pastoral promise is that Jesus is our good shepherd.

[28 : 41] A shepherd who will take us through even the valley of the shadow of death and who will take us safely through to the other side. As our lives find their purpose and their unity bound up with him.

Because see the words verse 14, the ones that are in brackets and don't come and ask me why afterwards. I have no idea. Verse 14, you will prevail over them in the morning.

Now what I do know is that most commentators agree that that's a reference to resurrection. And so here's the invitation, this worldview shaping psalm.

Remember we said that at the start. This worldview shaping psalm makes to us all. Friends, remember the question at the start. Which grave will be your guide? Because there's another grave on offer this morning.

It's Jesus' empty one. The invitation of the psalm is to come and to quote Christian apologists called Leslie Newbig and see that Christ is the clue to all that is.

[29 : 52] Let his empty grave be the thing that shapes our life and our worldview and how we understand purpose and power and wealth and all those things.

Let his empty grave be the thing that defines it for us. When we gaze there and take it in, everything's changed. That's our future.

And we should never forget, should we, as the church, that we are, dear friends, wherever God has put you this morning. In your workplace, in your family, in your university, in your college, wherever he's put you this morning, that we are good news people in a bad news world.

It's what the future is. If that's what the future is, then what freedom and courage should mark our lives.

Jesus' empty grave invites us to live our lives backwards. If he's got the end sorted, if we know where we're going, if we know how the story ends.

[30 : 53] And it doesn't end there, does it? C.S. Lewis captured that so brilliantly. It is but the beginning. If we know he's got that sorted, then you see how that impacts backwards? How we live today, how we understand our lives today.

So the psalmist says, why should I fear when evil days come? You know, just as we close, can I give you some homework? No, Nat, you wouldn't have come this morning, would you?

Can I give you some homework? Here's the homework. It's to go to the Bruntsford High Street and jump on the number 23 bus. Other buses are available, but that's my favourite. And here's the thing, that bus will take you all the way to the Royal Mile.

Here's what I'd love you to do after this. Jump off that bus at the Royal Mile. Visit Scotland's premier street, most famous street. Look at the statue that's almost at the top of the Royal Mile as it intersects going over onto the Mount.

Friends, who is that statue of? It is the statue of David Hume. Hume, one of the most prominent thinkers during the Scottish Enlightenment of the 18th century.

[32 : 03] Some people speak about this man like he was one of the best philosophers. Not just our country has ever known. One of the best thinkers that the world has ever known. Best described as a staunch sceptic.

And although he always avoided declaring himself outright an atheist, he had little time for the miracles or the supernatural that are found in the Bible.

Why? Because they weren't rational. Keep that word as key. Weren't rational. And you can imagine when this guy's around, when he's doing his thing at the height of his time, the doubt that he's sowing into churches and believers up and down this land, thinking to themselves, maybe this guy's got a point.

Maybe he is right. And of course, there is credible reasons to believe the things at the heart of the Bible. But here's someone saying the supernatural doesn't exist. People are rational thinkers. And yet here's what I find unbelievably funny.

Today, he's best known as being the guy with the golden toe. The guy who legend has it, if you touch that toe, then it grants you good luck.

[33 : 23] And the guy with the golden toe who people around the world flock here to touch it in order to get good luck. And all of this at the feet of a man who thinks people are rational.

Rational. Show me what irony means without telling me what irony means, right? Come back with me to verse 12 of this psalm.

Here's the cash out. Here's what we leave with this morning. Whatever you are facing right now is not to fear people who will not endure.

The flip side, to invest yourself fully in the one Savior who will.

And so, friend, we leave this morning with this psalm thinking, why should I fear when evil days come? Which grave is going to define our lives?

[34 : 29] Which grave is going to shape our worldview? There is a Savior. He lives. His name is Jesus. He is at the right hand of God interceding for us. One day he will return. And that, my friends, is as safe as houses.

Let me pray. And so, Father, we thank you for this psalm this morning that just oozes reasons to be hopeful about the future.

So, Lord, I pray for many of us here today. I've got no idea what's going on in so many of our lives, but I thank you that your Spirit is a much better pastor than I am. And so, I pray that he would be at work bringing the truth of this word into each of our lives.

Thank you that Jesus is a Savior who is a shepherd who knows exactly where his sheep are at. And so, I pray, Father, that you would meet us this morning with encouragement.

And perhaps with a gentle challenge, would you meet us with conviction? Would you install in us the certainty that this psalm gives us? But, Father, more so, thank you for the hope that comes in the morning.

[35 : 47] Thank you for the resurrection and hope. Father, may that be the grave that shapes our worldview. Father, thank you that you love us. Thank you that you hear us.

Thank you that you're with us. We pray these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.