



# What I Wish I Had Said at the Occupy **Wall Street** **Protest**

**Theme:** "Life is not found in riches, nor in resentment, but in Jesus Christ, and living daily for His purposes."

**Bible Reading:** Psalm 49:8

**Starting Questions:** Do you often complain about everything?

## **Psalm 49**

Hear this, all you peoples;

listen, all who live in this world,

2 both low and high,

rich and poor alike:

3 My mouth will speak words of wisdom;

the meditation of my heart will give you understanding.

4 I will turn my ear to a proverb;

with the harp I will expound my riddle:

5 Why should I fear when evil days come,

when wicked deceivers surround me—

6 those who trust in their wealth

and boast of their great riches?

7 No one can redeem the life of another

or give to God a ransom for them—

8 the ransom for a life is costly,

no payment is ever enough—

9 so that they should live on forever

and not see decay.

10 For all can see that the wise die,

that the foolish and the senseless also perish,

leaving their wealth to others.

11 Their tombs will remain their houses[b] forever,

their dwellings for endless generations,

though they had[c] named lands after themselves.

12 People, despite their wealth, do not endure;

they are like the beasts that perish.

13 This is the fate of those who trust in themselves,

and of their followers, who approve their sayings.[d]

14 They are like sheep and 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.

15 But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;  
he will surely take me to himself.  
16 Do not be overawed when others grow rich,  
when the splendor of their houses increases;  
17 for they will take nothing with them when they die,  
their splendor will not descend with them.  
18 Though while they live they count themselves blessed—  
and people praise you when you prosper—  
19 they will join those who have gone before them,  
who will never again see the light of life.  
20 People who have wealth but lack understanding  
are like the beasts that perish.

### **Reflection Reading**

Redemption does not come so easily, for no one can ever pay enough to live forever and never see the grave.

Psalms 49:8

A couple of years ago, as I was walking through the financial district of New York, I encountered a large, boisterous group of people who had camped out in Zuccotti Park. Unintentionally, I had stumbled upon the Occupy Wall Street protest. Placards, banners, and chants announced, "We are the 99%." They decried what they considered to be the injustice of the 1%, the wealthiest Americans, many of whom worked on Wall Street.

As I observed the protest, all of a sudden a reporter stuck a microphone in my face. A TV cameraman filmed as I was asked, "What do you think of this protest?" I said something about being glad to live in a land where people are free to express their views openly. I doubt what I said was incendiary enough to make the six o'clock news, however.

In retrospect, I wish I had remembered Psalm 49. You see, this psalm speaks directly to those who resent the power and privilege of the wealthy. It offers unexpected comfort: Even the rich "cannot redeem themselves from death by paying a ransom to God" (49:7). Indeed, "no one can ever pay enough to live forever and never see the grave."

I wonder what would have happened if I had said to that television reporter, "Oh well. I don't worry much about the 1%. They're going to die, just like everyone else." I might have made the evening news if I had paraphrased Psalm 49: "Those rich folk on Wall Street, they will die, just like these protesters. Just like you and me, in fact."

Psalm 49 should not be used to defend injustice or to suggest that it's fine to be rich and unconcerned about the suffering of the poor (see Micah 6:1-16; James 5:1-6). There is plenty in Scripture that calls us to care for the poor (for example, Isa. 58:1-14). But, the fact that we all will die puts life in perspective. It can help us break free from the bondage of resenting those who have what we do not. It reminds us that true life is not to be found in the accumulation of goods, but in using what we have been given for good. As we read in 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

"Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money,

which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life."

"That they may experience true life," the life that really is life. Such life is to be found, not in riches, not in resentment, but in Jesus Christ, and in living each day for his purposes.

### **Dynamic Reflection**

1. How do you respond to Psalm 49?
2. Do you find this Psalm encouraging? Scary? A downer?
3. How might the fact that everyone dies—including you and me—make a positive difference in the way we live today?

### **Application**

1. How your mindset and actions changed after reflecting on this.
2. What can you do to practice this teaching in your work.