

“Funding Our Fears”

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Series: *Psalms*

Bible Text: Psalm 49

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Well, if you are new to CPC, then this is the portion of the service where we get to listen, get to enter in, and what we typically do is take a passage of scripture and pray and research it this week, and come with a message that I believe is from God. Our passage, as we've said already, is Psalm 49, and typically what we do is just jump right into the passage. I want to read the passage for you, but I want us to do a little bit of legwork first this morning because I think it deserves an introductory note, and it'll help us, too, just to gain a bit of the context of what we're dealing with. You'll see at the beginning of Psalm 49, if you have it open in your Word or on a phone or wherever you might be looking at the scriptures this morning, there's always a subheading. There's always something that tells you a little bit about who the author is and what the context is, and this morning in Psalm 49, we read,

to the choir master, a psalm of the sons of Korah.

That might just sound like a very, very strange Old Testament name, but it's an important story if you don't know it already about who the authors are here. Back in the Old Testament, one of the central stories of the Old Testament is God rescuing his people, Israel, from Egypt, and one of the people that Moses goes in and rescues is a man named Korah, Korah and his family, and so they get out of Egypt, the great rescue of God, they get out into the desert, and what begins to happen is that Korah gets a little bit frustrated, and he says, we are not getting to this promised land as quick as I would like, and who is this guy Moses, and who's this guy Aaron, and why are they telling us everything that we need to do. And he gets very frustrated. And so there's a story in the book of Numbers where they approach Moses and Aaron, and they asked specifically, they said, *who made you prince over us?* So Moses says, well, let's let God decide the situation here. He says, so I'll tell you what I want you to do. You get your mob of people and all the people that you've stirred up, and you meet us in the tabernacle, and so they do. Korah shows up with all of his household, all the people that want to rebel against, and they come before God, and they say, God, you decide. You decide who's going to be leader, and God in that moment says, Moses, Aaron, why don't you guys take a step outside of the tabernacle, because I'm going to kill all of these people. And so Moses, as he typically does, he has compassion on the people, and he says, Lord, whoa, whoa, whoa, he said, not all of these people are guilty.

There's kids in here. There's family members. We shouldn't all have to pay the price for this one guy, and he says, fair enough. He says, tell them what I'm about to do, and anybody who wants to flee needs to flee now. And after that happens, God opens up the earth and swallows Korah and his people alive.

It's a really sobering story. But one of the interesting things is now we have a psalm written by the sons of Korah, because we're told just two chapters later, specifically by the author of Numbers, that when the call was given by Moses and Aaron to get out, that the sons listened. Numbers 26 says the sons of Korah did not die, and when Moses gave the warning, they got out. That they followed God rather than their own father, that they chose faithfulness to God rather than the approval of man, and they lived. It's important because the psalm begins with this idea that the sons of Korah are saying, if anybody is out there with understanding, listen in. We have some wisdom to share. My mouth shall speak wisdom, and it's wisdom for everyone, both rich and poor, high and low, all inhabitants of the earth. They say, incline your ear, because we want to share with you what we have learned about what it is that we as a people actually fear, and how the spiritually mature are called to respond.

That's the heart of what the psalm wants to talk about, that these sons who witnessed the death of their father and their family swallowed alive into the earth, they know a thing or two about fear. Their own fear, the fear of their father, the fear of the Lord, and this psalm is their gift to us with ears to hear. So let's listen in.

Psalm 49, to the choir master, a psalm of the sons of Korah. Hear this, all peoples. Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom. The meditation of my heart shall be understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb. I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre. Why should I fear in times of trouble when the iniquity of those who cheat surround me, those who trust in their wealth and the boast of their abundance of their riches? Truly no man can ransom another. 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, for he sees that even the wise die. The fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they called lands by their own names. Man and his pomp will not remain. He is like the beasts that perish. This is the path of those who have foolish confidence, yet after them people approve of their boasts, selah. Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol with no place to dwell, but God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. 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 and his pomp, yet without understanding, is like the beasts that perish.

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to you this morning and we're incredibly grateful that you are the God who longs to share with us. That you say if any of you are lacking understanding, any of you are lacking wisdom, come to me and ask for it. Father, we're grateful that the sons of Korah did exactly that, and that by the preserving of your word, Lord, you share it with us today. Father, I pray for ears to hear these hard truths. Father, as always we pray that if there is anything in here, anything in my sermon at all that is false or untrue, Lord, that it would be forgotten, that it would simply fall away, but that we would not be a people who left this place today with head knowledge only, Lord, but what is true and what comes from you today and what you would have us hear, Father, that would move from our head to our heart, actually take root there, that we would be both convicted and reminded of the gospel, Lord, it would bear fruit, and that we would be a people together, living in light of eternity, living light in the gospel, living with a right understanding of both our wants and our needs, Lord, the ways in which you have ransomed us from death and the power of man, that we might see your son lifted up in our midst and leave looking more like him. It's in his name that we pray. Amen.

I recently just finished up a book, it's a couple of years old, you might have heard of it. It's a book called *Klara and the Sun*, it's written by the Nobel Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro. It's a very dystopian novel, and it tells the story of the world in several years in which we have finally come to the place where we have perfected AI, and also the ability to do designer gene editing in our children. It's a very heartwarming story. But here's what's interesting about the book, that Kazuo, he decides to write the story from the perspective of an artificial intelligence computer. So they are just observers in this world, and what's fascinating is, again and again, they themselves have no context, they have no past, they have no future, they have no way to understand exactly the state that the world is in, but what they can see is that everybody is afraid. I mean, they just see it, they see it in their language, they see it in their interactions, they see all of these people who are consumed, even though they themselves can't feel or express this emotion, they can see it in others, that everybody is consumed by fear, and perhaps even more importantly, what they can recognize, these artificial intelligence machines, is that every single decision that everybody is making around them is based on fear.

I think it's a helpful story for those of us in our own age, because we too are living like a people who are always on edge, always worried, always afraid, and that we too are making almost all of our decisions based on that fear. Whatever it is, name whatever it is, right, that our worries about our family or our finances or our futures or the problems that we have, right, all of these things, they sort of drive our hearts, and so we've all heard before the idea of fight, flight, or flee, right, or freeze, that's what it is, right, we all do that, we all understand that in these moments of crisis, when we are threatened or somebody that we love is threatened, these moments of crisis, our brain just sort of naturally kicks into gear, and we choose one of those three options, but what the book is talking about, and I believe what the sons of Korah want us to deal with is a different kind of fear. We're not talking about that instantaneous in the moment threat, we're talking about that low hum that runs under the surface for all of us, all the time. It's just there, right, that we are constantly, if ever left for a moment of silence, immediately our mind turns to that thing that is keeping us up at night, or waking us up early in the morning and not letting us go back to sleep. It's different for all of us, but the emotion of fear is constant.

And I would say that what the Bible teaches us in the same exact way that our brains in the moment of crisis naturally kick in to fight, flight, or freeze, so too our hearts have a natural inclination, that because we are a people that are wrestling with fear, what we naturally respond to fear is we grab an idol. Grab an idol. We grab on to something that we think can save us, rescue us, bring us comfort.

I was helped this week, I read this great article by a man named Dr. O'Brien, he's the executive director of Redeemer City to City, and he wrote this article this week talking about this phenomenon, the connection between idolatry and fear in particular. He writes, idols are physical representation of other gods, that means idolatry isn't loving something or someone more than God, it's worshiping additional gods out of fear. Fear of what, he writes, fear that God can't provide something you need, and so what you need in addition to God is other gods to fill in the gaps.

To put it another way, and this was the big takeaway for me, he says;

idolatry isn't rejecting God outright, it's diversifying your deity portfolio against an uncertain future.

Idolatry is hedging your bets. I think that is a much more nuanced, much more helpful way. We talk about idol worship all the time here, and I think it's easy for us to get into a mindset that it's like this very black and white thing, like, all right, well, I don't love anything more than God, he's saying that's not really the heart of the problem. We come here every single week, and every single one of us, if you are already a believer of Christ, will say, well, I just worship God, and yeah, I struggle with these things on the side, and he's saying, no, that thing on the side, that is the problem. You are diversifying your deity portfolio. You want God, plus. That really what you're saying is I totally trust God with everything, except I just want to have a backup, right? Like if you don't come through for me in this area, if you're not going to relieve my fear in the way that I want you to, then at least I'll have that on the side. I love that phrase, that we are afraid that God is not powerful enough or good enough to come through for us.

And the sons of Korah know this all too well. They had a front row seat to it. They watched their dad fall into this trap, and when their father was afraid that the leaders God had appointed couldn't be trusted or the promised land wasn't coming soon enough, wasn't on their timeline, they turned to personal power instead. They stirred up a mob, tried to take matters into their own hands, and so the sons of Korah, they learned a thing or two. Here's the wisdom they want to share with us.

The psalm starts with a question. It ends with an answer bracketed together in this entire psalm. The sons of Korah ask in verse five, *why should I fear?* Why should we fear? And they respond to their own question in verse 16, *be not afraid*. The whole psalm is about how we handle our fears, but it starts with that question, why should I fear? And I believe that it is not entirely rhetorical. They're not just asking it in a way that said, hey, I love God. Why should I be afraid?

They're not really asking that because the rest of the psalm is going to be an expression of all of the things that we fear. So they're asking, why should I fear? I'll tell you. I'll tell you why I should fear. I'll tell you why you fear, why I fear, and they're going to talk about it. And they are going to highlight for us that it is so consistently the same exact idols that we all turn to in those moments of fear. And for them in particular, they want to talk about our money.

The first fear they talk about is the fear of man.

I talked about this in the last sermon I preached before sabbatical, but it's worth repeating. And it comes up again and again and again all throughout the psalms, our fear of man. They say, why should I fear in times of trouble? When the iniquity of those who cheat me surround me, those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches, that's why I fear. Fear makes us feel powerless. We look around, we see people who are cheating and they are prospering. Though they're deceitful, crooked, materialistic, shallow. It seems to work out just fine for them, doesn't it? They're getting rich and they're boasting about it. They want everyone to know that they're wealthy and they treat anybody who has less than them as subhuman. They don't respect them.

And the theme that continually runs throughout the psalms is that people who play by the world's rules, they often win in the short term. That's a constant frustration. Everybody's crying out to God throughout the psalms. Why? Why these people who are rebelling against you, not living the way that you have called them to live, like just laughing in your face and they're prospering? Why do the wicked prosper? All of us who are trying to be faithful to you, we seem to be the ones suffering. That's the constant theme.

And the truth is, if you adopt the world's values and embrace the cultural narrative, guess what you get?

You will be loved.

You will be accepted.

You will be respected.

You will receive the praise of man.

That's a truism. So the sons of Korah ask, why should I fear in times of trouble? They say, I'll tell you, because I'm surrounded by the brokenness of this world. They use that word. Iniquity, the fallenness of the human heart, sin, betrayal, perversion, wickedness.

Why should I fear in times of trouble, they ask? Because there's a whole bunch of people around me who are cheating their way to the top and they're winning.

They aren't suffering. They aren't paying consequences. They aren't being punished. They are just running around boasting about their wealth and their vacations and their lifestyle and their beautiful homes and their new toys and the whole world, you know what it's doing? Patting them on the back, they say. They're getting exactly what they want out of it. Verse 13, *people approve of their boasts*. Verse 18, *while he lives, he counts himself blessed*. You get praise when you do well for yourself. Full stop.

The Bible is not afraid to tell it like it is. The sons of Korah are not afraid to tell it like it is. Let's not fool ourselves, they say. Money is power. Temporary power, the Bible will say, but very, very real power in our world. It really is he who has the most toys wins.

And so we come here. We come here week after week as a people and you can be told again and again, the world is lying to you. It's absolutely lying to you. God alone defined success and faithfulness. The abundant life that God offers cannot come to you by way of your finances, by way of your stuff. But then we know and you know that you're going to leave this place and for the next 40, 60, 80, 100 hours of your week, you're going to be told the exact opposite. And everything around you is going to confirm the latter, not the former.

I said last time I preached, I quoted Tim Keller. *God is on audio, but the world is on video*.

The message the world is telling you becomes the dominant narrative. We've got to confess that. It gets into our hearts, it gets into our blood streams. We slowly become more concerned about the opinions of others than faithfulness to God, and we end up fearing man more than God because let's be honest, the judge of this world, the world will judge you by your credentials. It will judge you by your bank account, your possessions, the envious lifestyle you post on social media. It will judge you based on that. The world says jump and we as a people, if we are not clear sighted about it, we simply say how high. You just tell me how high. Slowly over time we start hedging our bets, right? We start diversifying our portfolios. I will trust in God, but I'll also make sure that I'm successful enough in the eyes of man that I can be applauded so that I can still get accepted. I want God to delight in me, but when that feels distant or it just feels like a theological idea or it's so intangible, then guess what? I can make sure I get the delight of other people. It's simple. I can impress them and gain their respect through the money I possess.

So let's talk about money for a second. We're going to talk about it all morning because here's always the temptation, especially in a Western context, every single time I talk about people being rich, no one ever thinks I'm talking about them, ever. In fact, you can look at all the data for the last century, right? And over 50% at all times, no matter what's going on in America, people will self-identify as middle-class. Everybody. Because every single person knows someone who's making less than them, and everybody knows somebody who's making more, right? So when you hear the word rich, you think, like, well, you can't possibly be talking about me. And so I want us this morning to all get in the same exact boat, okay? Let's talk about how rich we are right here collectively in this room, right? Just by the very fact of where we were born and where we live, okay? If you take the national average of our country and then take the national average of every country in the world, the global annual income of every single person

and spread it out across the world, it comes out to every single person making \$1,480 a month. That's the global average, less than \$18,000 a year, okay? And we know that in order to get an average, that means that some people, like my brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone, are making \$8 a month, okay? So let's just be honest, right? Myself included, okay? Let's all say to ourselves today, they're talking about us. We are filthy rich, okay? We just are. Let's all get in the same boat together. Let's do that.

And because we have such access to wealth in this country, it is almost by default for every single one of us the idol that we most naturally turn to, because we can. And because everybody else is doing it, it is the most acceptable sin that we struggle with in the American church.

Money means stability for us. It means comfort. It represents responsibility and respect and success. And as Hobie reminded us last week, what money provides for us is a never-ending distraction so that we do not have to think about the deeper things of God. And most importantly, as the sons of Korah say here, we do not have to think about our mortality. We don't have to think about death. That's the second thing they want to talk about today.

Not only our fear of man, but our fear of death.

They say, be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies, he will carry nothing away.

I'm not sure if you heard the story, but I did. Back in February on the BBC, they were telling the story of a man named James Howell who back in 2013, so over ten years ago at this point, he was cleaning his house, and he was cleaning his home office and he was throwing out old things and one of the things he found was an old hard drive that he could no longer use, wasn't updated for his computer anymore so he tossed it in the trash, threw it in a garbage bag, put the garbage bag out by the street. The next morning, his girlfriend took it on her way to work, threw it in the dumpster, went to the landfill, and it was two days later when he went to go check on his current Bitcoin investment only to figure out he threw out the wrong hard drive. And what was on that hard drive were the numbers that he needed to access his \$800 million worth of Bitcoin. What that man has done now for the last 12 years of his life since that day is try to buy the landfill. That's what he wants to do. He's tried to get investors. He's tried to get a team of people. He is currently at almost \$70 million so that he can go and buy this landfill and find the hard drive. Twelve years of his life spent chasing those riches, significant portion of just the very few years that any of us are given on this life. So yes, he's got a bit of fame, I guess, if you want to call this fame. I know his name now. You know his name. But here is the man's story. For his entire life now, what James Howell is going to be known for is the guy who spent his entire life in every waking moment trying to pick through garbage to find his money. That's his life story. That's what's going on in his tombstone.

I heard that back in February, and it has stayed with me ever since because I thought, you know what, this is a very, very exaggerated form of the life of almost every single person I know, including myself. That really when we think about how we are spending our time, our energy, all

of the things that are consuming our minds, it does seem like we're in this giant game of just forever trying to spend our lives in order to make more money, right? We might not be picking through the garbage for it, but sometimes it feels that way. I know people that have sacrificed their family, their personal health, sacrificed everything in pursuit of more money. You know people like that. Because we think it will fill up a hole in our heart. We think it will provide us enough distraction so we can forget for just a few moments or a few years that our days are actually numbered, no matter how much stuff we have. Sons of Korah say *even the wise die. The fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others, their graves or their homes forever, their dwelling place to all generations, though they're called lands by their own name.* They had like entire lands named after them. That's how rich and powerful they are. But he says *man and his pomp will not remain. He's like the beasts that perish.*

And the sons of Korah can write about this. They know about this. This is a part of the human condition. This is a part of every single person's struggle. It's a constant fear for us that we will not have enough. And it doesn't matter what time period or what land or what people you're talking to, whether it's camels or gold or land or American dollars, we all struggle with it, because it is always meant for every people at every time, money means security for us, security. And so it's exactly what you turn to in those times when you are most worried or fearful. That's what you crave more than anything else, something stable, something sure. I need something for the future, something secure.

But it's a false security, isn't it? Like every other counterfeit God, it cannot deliver on its promise. That's why the Bible spent so much time talking about it. Ashes to ashes, from dust you've come, from dust you will return. And Job himself said, naked I came into this world from my mother's womb and naked I will return. I came into this world empty handed. And I and you are going out of this world empty handed.

Sons of Korah say that *even your glory goes down with you.* That's a powerful phrase. Even your glory is going to degrade with you, your reputation, your fame, the esteem that people held you in, all the praise, all the popularity, everything that your wealth earns you, it dies with you, he says. You won't experience any of that for all of eternity from inside your coffin. That's what he's saying here. Your glory goes down with you. All the pats on the back, all the attaboys, all the days you woke up feeling like you were killing it. It says when you're dead, you're dead. That doesn't even go down with you. *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 the light.*

And so perhaps most sobering of all the sons of Korah say if your life right now tells the story of a man or a woman without wisdom, without understanding, they say that again and again. If you are building your own kingdom rather than God's, the sons of Korah say when your life finally comes to an end, your death will be nothing more than the death of an animal. That's dark. They say it twice.

Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish.

Many of you have livestock, right? You lose animals every single year and you've learned, you've learned a long time ago not to get too emotional about it because it's part of the agrarian life. Animals get attacked, they get sick, they don't survive birth, animals die. And apart from being united in Christ, apart from having what they say, the right understanding, the right kind of wisdom that comes from God without knowing the one who is giving you eternal life as a gift, without knowing him, he says your death is going to be just like the death of any other animal. That's what it's going to be like. That is sobering, dark, honest language.

So when we struggle with our fear of man, we believe that money can insulate us from insecurity and when we're confronted with the reality of our own mortality, we actually believe that our wealth can make us feel immortal, all powerful. So the ultimate wisdom of the sons of Korah, they say instead we must be a people who allow ourselves to be ransomed. That's our final point.

The solution to our fears is not money and possessions, but to be ransomed.

That word ransom appears twice in this passage, both in the context of fearing men and fearing death. No one can ransom you, they say. No man can ransom you. Nothing but God can ransom you from death. Ransom means to purchase, purchase back. It's actually slavery language, right, which is fitting. It's a fitting analogy in a psalm about the God of money, that we feel controlled by the opinions of others. We feel helpless by death's pursuit of us. We feel powerless in the face of both options. We feel owned. We feel enslaved. And Christ has come, he says, to ransom us from both.

But what does that look like practically? One thing to say that, okay, fine, be ransomed. What would that look like? What do a ransomed people, people who know that their identity is found in Christ and that they have no fear of the grave because he has been ransomed from that as well. What does it look like? Two things. One is contentment, and two is honesty.

Contentment

I want to ask this morning, if you have ever dared ask yourself the question, how much is enough? How much is enough? If you ever stopped and taken a critical look at your heart and asked the difference between a want and a need, you ever believe the cultural assumption that obviously, obviously for every single one of us, there is one and one only trajectory for every single one of us, you are to keep climbing the ladder as high as you can go. It's not even questioned, right? Of course you take the promotion. Of course you move your family for the new job. Of course you do this. Of course you're willing to do whatever it takes because the obvious thing is to constantly pursue no matter what the cost is, more money, right? That's the cultural assumption and we don't ever question it. It's the obvious thing. Of course we do that.

Do you and do I honestly always, always need more? Christ taught us to pray, give me this day, my daily bread. This has struck me so many times this week. It's a prayer that I've prayed a

thousand times. Many of you, especially you've been part of CPC, you prayed it a thousand times. We know it by heart. It's the Lord's prayer. Give me this day, my daily bread, but then we pray that prayer and almost as quickly as it's out of our mouth, we rush to our computers. We check on our investments, our retirement funds and our portfolios, hoping against hope that we would never actually ever have to pray that prayer. That somehow on the one hand, Christ is saying, give me this day, my daily bread is the prayer of the faithful person, right? And yet we turn around and we say, no, no, no, no, no. The really responsible person is the person who never has to pray that prayer.

That's not what Jesus said. Jesus himself lived a life of poverty. Jesus himself was a homeless man. Jesus himself sent out the 12 and said, don't bring anything with you. Let God provide for you. And yet we turn around and we say, no, no, the truly responsible person is the one who never has to ask for help. Do you see how inconsistent that is?

The apostle Paul said, I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am in. I know how to get along with little and I know how to live in prosperity in any and every circumstance. I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through him.

Can you say that?

Can I say that?

You know, I can't tell you how many times I have been told that short term missions are so important because it gives all of us wealthy Westerners an opportunity to see how the 99% of the rest of the world live. And I agree that's important. It's good for us. But I also can't tell you how many times people come back from those trips and I hear the same exact thing. And if you have been on one of these trips, you have probably said it yourself, how unbelievable it was to be with people who had so little and had so much faith. It was incredible. I couldn't believe it. They have nothing. They're on mud floors. They have no shoes. They have no clothes on their back. And yet they were praising God so much more than we do. It was unbelievable. Their joy, their gratitude, all those things. And we come back and we think, okay, well, the takeaway from that then is I simply need to be more grateful for what I have.

We never ask the harder question. Could it possibly be that people who live by faith actually have more faith? Could it be? Could it be a blessing for those people? Could it be actually true that when God said it is really, really difficult for a rich person to enter heaven, it's going to be hard.

And that people that do not struggle with their investments and their future, do not even know where their next meal is coming from, really do have a relationship with God that you and I do not possess.

Maybe that's what they want to teach us. Because friends, contentment doesn't just happen. It won't. Right? It's a practice. It's a discipline. You'll never wake up one morning and suddenly find yourself content. If you do, please let me know how to do that. That's not how my mornings start, right? It's not just going to happen. You become a content person when you take an honest inventory of your life. You take off the blinders. You've got to silence for a moment the cultural narrative that's blaring in your ears. And you've got to ask the hard questions. What would it look like for me as a follower of Christ to live the life of faith in which the prayer for daily bread genuinely becomes my own? What would that look like for me? That's why the second thing is honesty.

Contentment, but also honesty.

Even though money brings us popularity and comfort and experiences or luxury, like I said before, what we really crave, every single one of us, is security. That's what we want at the end of the day. And so how much money we need is different. It's different for every single one of us. Which is why one of our chief ways of feeling exposed is when people talk about money. It is actually one of the most taboo subjects that we can talk about, is our money. We know it's exposing.

It has never ceased to amaze me. For over 20 years now, I've been in ministry, I can't tell you how many people have walked into my office. Happened this morning at 5:30 through a text message. And people will tell me again and again the worst thing they have ever done in their life. They will confess their adultery, their addictions. They will say, here's the thing that I hope nobody ever finds out about me, ever. And they will tell me. But if I were to slip a piece of paper across the table and say, well, why don't you just write down for me how much money you make every year? That would be a bridge too far. Now we're getting personal. Now we're prying, right? So you go to small group, many of you are part of a community group. We ask super hard questions in there, right? We're going to ask you to take a deep dive into your own heart and say, like, what are your idols? What are the things that you struggle with? But if the first question this week was, I want everybody just to share how much money they make, now all of a sudden our community groups would be just like crazy places, right? Why is that? We have got to ask that question. Why is that the most personal question somebody could ask about? You would tell me your worst moment, your worst sin you have ever struggled with, but most of us would rather right now write out our testimony for one another than give each other our tax returns. That's strange to me.

I've thought about that all week, and I guess part of it is because my salary is open for everybody. You can just ask Gus and he'll send it to you, so it's not a secret, and I was a missionary before this, so I had to tell people all the time, but that has always been strange to me as a pastor. But I think it's because how much money we have and how we spend it tells us much more about ourselves than we would ever, ever want to share. It's exposing.

Jesus told us we're to store up our treasures in heaven, but is that what our bank account says?

Jesus told us to use our wealth to build up the kingdom, to care for the poor, to marginalize the widows, the fatherless, to welcome the foreigner, but are those the values someone would see in my spending, and yours? We know that our finances reveal a deeper state of our heart.

It is exposing, and while the world may look at your possessions and your vacations and your wardrobe and your cars, and they say, that person is gifted. That person is successful. Those that are spiritually mature, like the sons of Korah, they look at that instead, and they say there is a person who is petrified. There is a person who is paralyzed by fear that does not possess contentment and has no trust in the Lord. That's what it reveals.

Your money and the lifestyle it brings tells the world how much you think you need to overcome your fear. How much you need in order to be happy or comfortable or feel successful or to gain the kind of approval from the kind of people you want to impress. Every single one of us has a number. I do too. If I could just make this much this year, if I could just get to this place, and guess what? It does not matter how much you make. You can make minimum wage or you can make six figures. Every single person does it. Every single one of us feels in our heart, I just need to make only a little bit more, just a little bit more, and then I wouldn't have to worry anymore.

All of us, the sons of Korah say instead, be ransomed. Be freed from this. Your life is already of infinite worth, they said. Christ has already paid the price. You could not pay it yourself. It was too great. He says that, and the sons of Korah say that. They say no man can ransom another man because the price is too high. No person can pay it, and in Christ, God now calls you his son and his daughter, and what's more? Christ says, what is mine is yours, that the Father has given me everything, and you now as an heir get it all. You are a royal priesthood. A people called him. Christ says, you are mine. No other created human being can ever take that away. You are so precious that Christ himself, he was willing. He was willing to surrender his own life, endure the boasting, the arrogance, the mocking chants of a crowd who hated him, who thought he was unworthy, he was the cursed one, so that you and I could be set free from man. Christ's sacrifice speaks so loudly over your life that the opinions of the world cannot penetrate your heart. That's what the sons of Korah say.

We do not need to be afraid of man because man does not own us. He does not tell me my destiny or yours. Man cannot ransom me because somebody else already has, and you don't need to be fearful of the grave because you have been ransomed from that as well. The sons of Korah tell us you don't need to be afraid of death because there's only one who can rescue from its power, and it's not money, and it's not our possessions, and it's not the opinion of man. Christ himself has already overcome the grave, and if you are his, it has no hold over you.

So brothers and sisters, if you're here today and you have a longing in your heart to know this Christ and the freedom that it brings, if you are saying today, yeah, I'm entangled by all of that, I am so exhausted by my constant fears and worries of what other people think about me and the fact that I'm a mortal human being with a destiny that I can't overcome, if that is you today, I would say simply respond. Just respond to that longing in your heart, and Christ will meet you exactly where you are in this place.

And if you're here today and the Spirit has convicted your heart that you too have already diversified your portfolio, that maybe it doesn't look quite like you thought it did to have an idol on the shelf that you bow to every single day, that you are here and you're confessing that Christ is the only way, and yet you know in your heart the blinders are off today, I've diversified my portfolio. I trust God, plus. That if God today were to take away all my possessions, if I were to lose my job, lose my house, if I was to be in a situation like Job, would I respond like him?

That's what Ligon Duncan says on the reflection in the beginning. He says, you know, when everything comes crashing down, when you lose everything, then you know what you believe in, what you love, what you treasure.

If you have diversified your portfolio of God's, that you are hedging your bets that money has an outsized role in your life, friends, there isn't anything here today that's unique. It's a sin like any other sin, and you've heard us say it a thousand times, here's your job, confess, repent, confess, repent, believe again the Gospel. Be honest with yourself in God. And know this, that when you do, the sons of Korah remind us here, God has ransomed your soul, and he will receive me. We have no fear of running to the God who has ransomed us to confess, I have diversified my portfolio, and I have trusted in a thousand other gods in addition to you. God has ransomed your soul, and he will receive you. We have freedom today to empty our portfolios and be ransomed again by the one who purchased your life and mine. Let's pray.

Oh, Father, we're so grateful for your word, it does not pull punches, deals with every single struggle of the human heart, and has an answer for it, Lord, and the struggles of the sons of Korah and the struggle of the people of the Old Testament, New Testament, our time, and in the future, Father. We are a people who live in constant fear and anxiety, and we turn to other gods. And for us, especially today, Lord, as the sons of Korah remind us, we confess that so often that has been the almighty dollar for us. Father, would you come and cleanse our heart. Remind us again that we have been ransomed, Lord, that we are not a people who live by fear, but that your perfect love casts that out, that the promise of who we are in Christ and our sure destiny because of his death and resurrection is ours as well, that we are heirs to the kingdom. Father, help us practice the discipline of contentment and be honest with ourselves and others, and before you, Lord, help us to be a people that pray honestly and not hypocritically, give us this day our daily bread. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.