

Surviving the Financial Crisis

Yesterday was the seventy-ninth anniversary of the 1929 stock market crash. The big sell-off began on Thursday, October 24, 1929. The market continued to fall for a full month, reaching a low point in 1932. It wasn't until 1954, 25 years later, that the market returned to pre-1929 levels. American economist Richard M. Salsman said, "Anyone who bought stocks in mid-1929 and held on to them saw most of his or her adult life pass by before getting back to even."¹

With the recent implosion of world markets, many today are concerned that we could be repeating history. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been lost. Companies are going under. Unemployment and foreclosures are climbing. And entire industries are clambering for government bailouts.

World leaders are gravely concerned. At the start of the meltdown, U.S. president George Bush warned, "Our entire economy is in danger." Respected investor Warren Buffett calls this an "economic Pearl Harbor" and is concerned that the United States could be facing "its biggest financial meltdown in American history."

Market analysts are equally alarmed. "You have to throw out the history books because there's really nothing to compare this to," says Jim Dunigan, a chief investment officer at PNC. Art Hogan, chief market strategist for Jefferies & Co., agrees that we've not seen anything like this since the Great Depression. "We've never witnessed this before," Hogan warns. "There's no road map for this."²

God Has a Road Map

Hogan may be correct when referring to human history, but God does have a map for this wild terrain. Centuries ago, His inspired writers clearly indicated that we would experience a time of great financial upheaval in the last days.

In fact, **James 5:1-5** sounds like it came from yesterday's front page news. The greed of individuals and corporations causes financial disaster. Intense misery inflicts the world as the "treasure heaped together for the last days" evaporates.

The book of Revelation also predicts a time of economic hardship. We are warned that the "merchants of the earth" will "weep and mourn" because no one buys their merchandise. There will come a time when "no one may buy or sell" except they worship the antichrist beast (**Rev. 18:11-17; 13:17**).* Many Bible students see in these texts a pattern: economic hardship leads to economic controls, which ultimately leads to the ability to coerce worship. This is a pattern that could very well be in the making right now.

How Can This Happen?

Some may wonder how enforced worship could possibly happen in a freedom-loving country such as the United States. People do not easily give up their rights to buy and sell, or their right to worship or not. But a series of crises can whittle away at our psyches until society is ready to surrender virtually any freedom for the promise of security.

Look at what happened after 9/11. We took a quantum leap towards Revelation 13 when Congress quickly passed antiterrorism bills. Secret searches of homes and property, FBI access to medical and financial records without a court order, interrogation without probable cause, closed judicial hearings, and indefinite detention became reality post-9/11.

Add to this the world's response to recent financial difficulties. Entire economies and business sectors are being taken over through government bailouts that leave bureaucrats ultimately in control of buying and selling.

Some will argue these moves are needed to protect society. Perhaps, in a sense, they are correct. But on the other hand, this could be part of the devil's plan. By creating crises that don't have good solutions, he traps us in a classic no-win dilemma. Without government intervention we are vulnerable to terrorism and financial collapse. And with it, we are put in an equally dangerous predicament through the loss of liberty.

So, how can we avoid Satan's traps? Especially when we see the economy collapsing and our earthly resources and freedoms disappearing? How will you feed your family? How will you keep a roof over your head? These are the questions people are asking. Thankfully, God's Word tells us how to be secure during times of uncertainty.

Three Ways to Prepare

Here are three things you can bank on during tough financial times.

1. Put your spiritual house in order:

Check your relationship with Jesus. Is He first in your life? There is a law of physics that says two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time. This is true in the spiritual realm, too. **Matthew 6:24** tells us that we "cannot serve both God and Money" (NIV). There is room enough for only one god in our lives. Whatever you serve will eventually consume your thoughts, feelings, and desires. It will shape your very person.

Satan knows this, so he stealthily lays traps for Christians. Some of his most effective snares lead Christians to sacrifice their faith on the altar of greed. They spend their best energies, talents, and resources for the almighty dollar instead of the Almighty God.

I once met a man who was doing this very thing. We happened to be sitting together on an airplane. During our discussion he told me, "I don't serve God. I serve money."

Here was an intelligent fellow, holding several degrees already and currently studying to be a lawyer—but he was missing the wisdom of the ages. He didn't understand the number one principle to economic security—Make God first in your life. He should have known better. He was raised in a Christian family by dedicated Adventist parents. Yet he sadly chose money over God and was out of the church.

Many are making similar mistakes. They are serving money when they should be serving God. They work on God's holy Sabbath. They hold back the tithe rather than trust God. They follow the business practices of the world instead of the principles of truth. And the irony is that in spite of their slavish service to money, they will lose it either in an economic collapse or certainly when Jesus returns. The only thing any of us will ever take into heaven is our character and our relationship with God. When you put your spiritual house in order, you invest in eternity.

2. Put your financial house in order:

One reason the economy is in such shambles is because people borrowed more than they could reasonably afford. They were led to do so by the greed of lenders. There are many biblical principles on how to put your financial house in order. Here are just a few.

Be free of debt. "The borrower is servant to the lender" (**Prov. 22:7**). When we are indebted to someone else, we lose a degree of freedom. If you haven't yet done so, pay off your credit cards, car loans, second mortgages, and all other debts. Consumer debt in the United States is now at \$2.6 trillion dollars, not including real estate mortgages.

According to the Wall Street Journal's "MarketWatch," the next big tidal wave to strike the markets is this debt. "Credit-card debt is on the brink of imploding and will be the next storm to hit the fragile finance industry."³ This is very concerning. The economy has already suffered a succession of financial tsunamis. How much more can it handle?

If you don't want to be servant to your lenders, cut back on spending, sacrifice if need be, and pay down your debts. Start with the highest interest debt you have by adding an extra amount to your monthly payments until it is paid off. Next, take what you were paying on this retired loan every month and add it to the payment of your next highest interest loan. With this extra payment you will soon pay off your second loan. Then put the amount for these two loans towards the third loan every month. Keep doing this until all your loans are paid off. By following this plan, you will soon be free from debt and not as vulnerable to wide swings in the economy.

Another important strategy is to have some money set aside for emergencies. What if you lose your job or get ill and can't work? Experts say you need several months of living expenses set aside in a cash account for easy access.

Now is a good time to discuss with your family your standard of living. Is it possible for you to live more simply? Have your "wants" become "needs," consuming every dollar you make and then some? Perhaps you don't need the large house or the extra car. Selling them could provide important relief and allow you to refocus on other priorities such as your relationships with loved ones and God.

You may even want to prayerfully consider a move to a more rural location. The Spirit of inspiration has long urged God's people about the dangers of the big cities, especially during the end-times. A home in the country, or a small town, could be a safe harbor in times of urban stress. Certainly, most everyone could find the fresh air and open space a benefit even in stable times.

3. Put God's house in the proper order:

Too many people have their priorities backwards. They earn their money, spend it on their needs and wants, and then see what is left over that they can contribute to the church. However, God's house must be at the top of our priorities if we plan to survive economic collapse.

This is no time to be stingy with God. We must resist the natural tendency to hoard money. Now is when we need to be the most liberal with God's cause.

Did you know that people respond more readily to God during times of financial uncertainty than compared to stable periods? It is not hard to understand why. Once the earthly god of money is removed, people start looking for a more dependable God in whom they can trust. Right now, we can be most successful in sharing God's last-day message with millions who are looking for hope.

But we can only do so as the gospel work is financed by you and me. If we don't return a faithful tithe and offerings, we are allowing Satan to deceive and destroy people.

How, you ask? Consider this—God owns everything. “The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness” (**Ps. 24:1**). “‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts” (**Hag. 2:8**).

Everything God owns is invested in saving and benefiting lost humanity—to lead people to Christ and eternal life. Now let me ask you a question: if God wants to invest His silver and gold into saving souls, where is He going to get it from?

Remember, God has no pockets. The only pockets He has for His money are our pockets. He lends us the bounties of the earth and allows us to hold them for Him. Then, when He needs something for His work, He calls upon us to reach into our pocket and give it back to Him.

We can't do any better than to liberally invest in God's work. Especially during these uncertain economic times. Remember, the sooner the world is introduced to Jesus, the sooner He will return.

Jesus Is Coming Soon

Recent events are unmistakable reminders that we live in the last days. The stock market, banks, and world economies have been in a free fall. Tensions are mounting around the globe. Meanwhile, terrorists are plotting their next attack. If they manage to catch us at this vulnerable economic time, it will certainly mean exponential chaos.

In spite of all their promises to the contrary, politicians do not have the answer for these problems. Look at the billions of dollars they've thrown at this black hole—and it only keeps growing larger and larger.

This is why God's people must help desperate men and women find the only true Answer. If we don't warn them now, many will play directly into the enemy's trap to accept a false christ as the healer of this world's troubles. People need to know what you and I have known for years—Jesus is coming!

This is the time, more than ever, not to panic, but to trust God and faithfully follow the instructions He has outlined for us in His Word. When we do this, we will survive anything that might happen in the financial markets. God Himself guarantees it.