Is This It?

by David Servant

David Servant explores the implications of the current economic crisis for Christians, emphasizing the importance of focusing on eternal values over earthly wealth.

Scripture: Luke 12:33, 1 Timothy 6:7, Hebrews 13:5, Revelation 13:3-16
Topics: "Eschatology", "Stewardship"

Description

David Servant addresses the concerns of Christians amidst the current economic crisis, exploring the potential signs of the end times and the rise of the antichrist as described in the Book of Revelation. He emphasizes the uncertainty surrounding eschatology and the need for humility in interpreting prophetic events. Drawing parallels between historical events and the present economic situation, he highlights the interconnectedness of the global economy and the implications of a world-wide economic system requiring a mark of allegiance. David encourages reflection on the value of earthly wealth in light of eternal perspectives and the importance of considering the plight of the poor during times of financial distress.

Transcript

As we witness bank failures, unprecedented government bailouts, and wild swings in global stock markets, the current economic crisis has many Christians wondering. Is this the beginning of the end? Is America about to collapse? Is the stage being quickly set for the rise of the antichrist? Christians tend to be even more pessimistic than the general population during times like these, knowing from Scripture what ultimately is in store for the world. We have no doubt that, sooner or later, John's prophetic visions recorded in the Book of Revelation will come to pass.

For starters, let me confess that I've always been sure that the antichrist is going to be revealed one day. And I've always been sure that Jesus is going to come back. However, after studying eschatology (the doctrine of the end times) off and on for the past thirty years, there is one thing that I'm much more certain of now than I was thirty years ago. That is this: People who are sure about their eschatology should not be so certain. Just ask the author of Eighty-Eight Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1988. The only real difference between him and thousands of other Christians is that he wrote a book, while they debated at Bible studies. Trust me; after all your antichrists repeatedly die off, you tend to become less dogmatic about your next pick.

I suspect that every Christian since Peter and Paul has believed that Jesus would return in his or her lifetime. The large majority have, so far, been wrong.

In any case, let's begin with a short refresher course on the antichrist before we try to ascertain if he's about to show up.

If you hold to the view that most of what we read in the Book of Revelation was not fulfilled before A.D. 70 and is yet to be fulfilled (as I do), then you are anticipating that the antichrist will one day possess world-wide dominance:

And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain (Rev. 13:7-8. emphasis added).

He will also exert world-wide economic authority:

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name (Rev. 13:16-17; see also Rev. 14:6-10 for evidence of the global reach of the mark of the beast).

And he will wield world-wide religious authority as well:

And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast....and they worshiped the beast....And all who dwell on the earth will worship him....and he (the second beast) makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast....And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to earth in the presence of men....And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed (Rev. 13:3b, 4b, 8a, 12b, 13, 15).

It does seem amazing that one person could gain such global dominance. Obviously, his rise to power will not happen overnight. It will require extraordinary circumstances, such as the convincing signs that Scripture says he will perform (see Rev. 13:13-14) and a world that is receptive to him. Because of his economic policies (the required mark to buy or sell), some speculate that he will climb to power on the back of a world economic crisis, perhaps like the one we see brewing right now.

We are reminded that the Great Depression of the 1930s began in the United States with the 1929 Crash on Wall Street. Over a few years it spread around the globe, leading to political upheaval in most countries. In Germany, the depression was the catalyst to Hitler's rise to power, ultimately leading (ten years later) to World War II and the deaths of 70 million people. Again, it all began on Wall Street. (I'll bet many folks in the 1930s thought the end was near.)

The world's economy is much more interconnected today than it was eight decades ago, and we are now watching world leaders and central banks around the globe work in unison to ward off a global recession. Governments are getting their hands deeper into the world's economic institutions, taking unparalleled steps, and new global financial policies are being established. Even if governments succeed in warding off a global recession, one can't help but wonder if their efforts can do anything more than just delay the inevitable. Those who spend a short time studying the modern banking system of creating money out of thin air will not find themselves filled with hope (see, for example, www.tysknews.com/Depts/Taxes/fed_banking_fraud.htm or http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-9050474362583451279 .)

As events unfold before us, a worldwide economic system that ultimately requires a mark on everyone's hand or forehead in order to participate, indicating their allegiance to the world's false savior, becomes a more believable possibility all the time. It remains to be seen, of course, if the current economic crisis will be stabilized or not, and if not, if it will lead to the kind of political turmoil that might set the stage for the man of sin. But it would seem, even in the worst-case scenario, that such a scenario would take a few years, at least.

I have friends who believe that disaster is quite imminent, and others who believe it is much more distant. (I love them all.) The only ones who know the future for certain are God and those whom He has personally told. And there are none who are claiming that they have heard God's voice on this who have consistently demonstrated that they always get it right. Everyone else who is making predictions is stringing scriptures together and speculating to some degree. So I'm just going to keep working for the Lord. And I'm still making plans for 2009.

To put the current crisis in some historical perspective, since the 1940s, the U.S. has been through ten recessions and ten bear markets, when the S&P 500 fell each time by an average of 31.5%. During the bear markets of 1973-74 and the most recent one of 2000-02, the S&P 500 fell nearly 50%. Each time there was a reason for the decline. At its low point a few days ago (October 10), the S&P 500 was 43% below its peak reached in October 2007. During the Great Depression, stocks dropped by about 90%, but that happened over a period of almost three years.

So you can see that things have looked quite bleak before, yet the stock market has always eventually recovered. Looking at it from that standpoint, now is the time not to sell, but to buy stocks---unless this is the beginning of the end, of course. If it isn't the beginning of the end, you will want to make sure you pull everything out before the "fall of Babylon" described in Revelation 18 (however you might interpret that), which, whatever it means, would not seem to be a good day for Wall Street.

On the other hand, if you fail to pull everything out before that day, it probably won't make much difference to you if you lose it all then. And don't forget that most American Christians are quite sure that they'll be "beamed up" before the antichrist's appearance and "the fall of Babylon." So either way, all your money on earth will be absolutely worthless to you eventually. And one second after you die (which is guaranteed to occur within the lifetime of everyone reading these words, give or take a second) all your earthly money will also become worthless to you.

I hope you are seeing some of the futility of trying to time the stock market, short or long term, not to mention the eternal wisdom of Jesus' commandment about not laying up treasures on earth "where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal." Heaven is the only sure investment. Earth is always a roll of the dice.

Our Greatest Fear: Moving to Six Flags

Many are saying that, from an economic standpoint, we're not heading for better times. The former chairman of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker, just stated that our economy is in a recession. And we all know that the U.S. government, in debt already to the tune of 10 trillion dollars---$86,000 for every American household---has just promised a potential 2 trillion dollars in various bailouts.* Of course, the government isn't just handing out free money; it hopes to recover much of the bailout money eventually.

Where will those two trillion dollars come from? It either has to be borrowed (more debt), or if the government can't find enough willing lenders, it has to be printed (created out of thin air). Currently, lenders are lined up, since the government is perceived as a safe bet in these troubled times due to its ability to tax and raise revenue. But if lenders fade and hundreds of billions of newly-created dollars begin circulating in the market place, they will ultimately dilute the value of every other dollar---better known as inflation. Your same dollars will buy less. Of course this is what the government has been slowly doing for decades. Inflation has devalued the dollar by about 95% since 1913, or 1% per year.

If the economic dominos continue to fall and we find ourselves in a global depression, our lives will certainly change. We will go from living in Disneyland to living at Six Flags---still in a fantasy world, but one that is not quite as enchanting. The nightmare that many have been dreading---a recession---would be a happy dream to the half of the world's people who are living on less than two dollars a day. How they would love to live in America during a recession, or even during a depression. It would seem like heaven to them.

Truly, the current fear of world's wealthy nations is nothing more than the fear of becoming less wealthy. It might be good to remember that perspective as we begin to "suffer." If you make $30,000 per year, your income puts you in the top 7% of the world's people (see GlobalRichList.com). If your net worth is $2,200 or more, you are in the top half of the world's wealthiest people. To be among the richest 10% of adults in the world, all you need is a net worth of $61,000 (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_ineq.)

It might also help us to remember that nine million people will die of hunger this year. 24,447 will die of hunger today. About 900 million people are presently undernourished. They don't have enough to eat. 1.4 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water. In light of such statistics, it is difficult not to wonder if the current economic crisis is a form of God's judgment on us. He really didn't have to do anything more than just allow us to reap the harvest of greed.

Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy (Ezek. 16:49).

Perhaps our current economic crisis will provoke us to consider the poor, especially those who will live their entire lives at a standard that is far below our worst current fears. Unlike so many of us, they aren't concerned that their retirement account has just dropped in value. The half of the world's people who live on two dollars a day or less, mostly subsistence farmers or city slum dwellers, never dream of retirement. They are focused on survival. If they are lucky, they might get a job that pays them pennies an hour, working in a factory that supplies goods (and profits) for a multi-national company, unwittingly growing the retirement funds of its stock holders (at least, until recently). During a global recession, those factories start laying off workers and shutting down.

Two Points to Ponder About the Stock Market

Since there is so much recent focus on the swinging stock market, here are two points to ponder in that regard:

1.) I've been very blessed to have my stock portfolio not lose any of its value during the market's recent dramatic decline, but only because I don't have any money invested in the stock market. But I do know the sickening feeling of losing too much money in the stock market a few years back. It was a wonderful opportunity, however, to learn something about what was in my heart. It helped lead me to some repentance. If the stock market's decline has provoked in you despair, panic, depression, sleeplessness, and so on, ask yourself what else in your life's experiences has provoked as much emotion. By that you can gauge how money ranks in your list of what is most important. It can be a wake-up revelation. It was for me.

My biggest regret then was knowing that I could have laid up treasure in heaven which I lost on the earth. If I had, I wouldn't have lost any of it, and others would have benefited who did not benefit because of my decision to love myself, rather than love my neighbor as myself. Now I know that heaven is the only secure place to invest.

2.) It was also several years ago when I faced up to the obvious fact that, when I own shares in a corporation, I'm partnered with that company. If that company profits by exploiting people, polluting the environment, or breaking the law, I'm profiting by exploiting people, polluting the environment and breaking the law. My profit comes at someone else's expense. That is hardly loving my neighbor as myself.

When I own shares in a mutual fund, I'm in partnership with scores of companies. How can I be sure that profits aren't being made at someone else's expense without investigating every company in that mutual fund? More fundamentally, how can I profess to love God but be partnered with and profiting from companies that do things that God hates? In this regard, may I recommend a very thought-provoking film that was recently recommended to me titled, The Corporation. It can be viewed for free at Google Video in two parts here: http://video.google.com/videosearch?q=the+corporation+Movie. Some parts may be a little too far left of center for some readers, but I still recommend viewing it.

If you must invest in the stock market, please do some homework. A good place to start is by googling "Socially Responsible Investing."

In conclusion, if you haven't liked this e-teaching, I want you to know that I still love you! (Keep that in mind before you write to me.) I close with three scriptures that you rarely find on refrigerator doors:

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim. 6:7-10)

Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys (Luke 12:33).

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