

From the Pastor's Study

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As I was writing this message, the financial world was much astir following the Federal Reserve's cut of its funds rate by three-quarters of a percent, the largest such cut since 1990. The market's initial drop was over 450 points before it began to recover, and it remained over 200 points down at day's end. The Dow had lost a significant part of its value in the past month or two, and a financial recession seemed unavoidable. Markets around the world had plunged the previous night, and analysts were nervous. The cut in interest was good news to those who have significant debt with flexible interest rates, but bad news to those with substantial savings. Lesson: if you put your trust in the financial market, you have much to worry about.

But this is not as new as you might think. About 3000 years ago, a very wise man wrote: **"If riches increase, do not set *your heart upon them.*"** That man was David, God's chosen King of Israel, and we find his words in Psalm 62:10. He knew that, even in times of prosperity, riches are fleeting, and those who put their trust in them are destined for disappointment. I find it interesting that the media is blaming our economic woes on such factors as the depressed housing market, when the obvious cause is nothing but greed. Greed moves those without wisdom to purchase things they can ill afford, simply because they can buy them on credit. Greed causes people to purchase things as cheaply as possible, even if it means rejecting American-made goods in favor of things made in third-world countries where people are paid a pittance for long hours of work. The result has been the export of most of our manufacturing jobs to foreign shores. Greed causes banks and other financial institutions to charge exorbitant rates for loans, while paying almost nothing on savings. Greed causes employers to hire illegal aliens who will work for a fraction of what they would pay American citizens. And greed causes people to withhold from the Lord that which is rightfully His. This, too, is nothing new. About 400 B.C. God said in Malachi 3:8-9: **"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say: 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation *of you!*"** David's son Solomon, who was for a time the wisest man in the world, wrote in Proverbs 11:6: **"The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the treacherous will be caught by *their own greed.*"** It was true in his day, and it is equally true today.

What I would like you to consider, in this rapidly deteriorating world, is this: What is the foundation upon which your life is built? Where do you put your trust? If it's in the things of this world, you are to be greatly pitied, for the day will undoubtedly come when you lose them all. In days gone by, when people purchased special burial clothes, it was often noted that "there are no pockets in a shroud." You really can't take it with you. Maybe you put your confidence in your good, stable job. Many people do. As you may know, I worked 27 years for a company that had never laid off a single employee. Even in the Great Depression, those who worked for Ohio Bell were secure. But then one day in 1993, 2700 managers were told to hit the road. I knew that God had a plan for my life, and that He intended to use what seemed like a financial disaster to move me into full-time ministry. Another man, who was in exactly the same position as I, went home and committed suicide. My trust was in our God, who said: **"I will never leave you, or forsake you"** (Hebrews 13:5). His trust was in his job, and when it was taken away, there was nothing left for him to hold on to.

Maybe you put your trust in your savings accounts. If so, you might do well to remember all those who jumped out of their office windows on Black Tuesday, 1929, when millionaires became paupers in a day. You may put your trust in people, or in philosophies or in your great accomplishments, but they can all disappear in a moment. How many great athletes have ended up impoverished or in prison, and how many great musicians died in poverty? How many painters, whose works now sell for millions of dollars, could barely afford to eat? Dictators, once loved and praised by their people, have often been disgraced and assassinated. Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers who ever lived, was forced to take poison because his teachings offended the ruling class. Fame, fortune and power are fleeting. Only God endures forever. There is but one Rock, one Fortress, one Firm Foundation upon which we can build our lives, and that is God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Without Him nothing is secure, but with Him we cannot fall.

I'm not saying that you should become like Pollyanna, traveling through life firmly convinced that nothing could possibly go wrong. I find people like that foolish, unrealistic, and annoying. What I am suggesting is that, as people of faith, we look honestly at life, and know that God is in control, and that He watches over those who belong to Him. That is what His Word teaches, and that is our ultimate security. Think of Daniel, when he was thrown into the lions' den. There he sat, alone and rejected, facing a pride of hungry lions

with nothing but his bare hands and his faith in God. What could he do in such a situation? Well, he could have curled up in a whimpering ball of self-pity and said: "God will take my soul when the lions eat my body." Or he could have had confidence in his youth and strength, and said: "They may have me for breakfast, but I'm going to give them a good fight!" And maybe, if he was strong enough, he could have killed one of those lions– but not all of them! He would still have lost. Instead, Daniel chose to trust in God, and he was delivered. Now, if you're familiar with that story, you realize that Daniel's faith didn't begin when he was dropped into that lions' den. It had been growing for years. And his faith was apparent to all who knew him. Even the pagan King Darius recognized Daniel's faith, and believed in the power of Daniel's God. Having been tricked by those who were jealous of Daniel into condemning him, Darius said as Daniel was being lowered into the pit: **"Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you"** (Daniel 6:16). Another lesson for us is this: don't wait until your world is falling apart to trust in God.

It has been said: "Into each life, a little rain must fall," and we all recognize and accept the truth of that statement. But sometimes it seems like "a little rain" has turned into a deluge. The rain pounds against our windows and the wind threatens to take the roofs off of our spiritual houses, and we begin to feel like Noah must have felt, when the rains continued to pour after more than a month. I can imagine him saying: "O.K. Lord, if you don't stop this soon we're never going to get off of this boat!" Imagine, in a world in which it had never rained, looking out the window of your boat and seeing nothing but water! How frightening that would have been, had Noah not had faith in Almighty God. But he trusted God, and God delivered him and his family, both from the flood and from the wicked world in which he had lived.

The world today is becoming increasingly dangerous and frightening. **"Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness'"** (2 Timothy 2:19). We can look at the world and know that whether we live, like Daniel and Noah, or die, like the martyrs in the Coliseum of Rome, God is with us, and He will deliver us from this world of trials and temptations into His Kingdom of light and love.

Remember Jesus' words from Matthew 7:24-27: **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the**

rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; but it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall." May God grant you the wisdom to build your spiritual house wisely – on Christ Jesus, the Rock of Ages.