

*Jesus' Bailout*

Everywhere you go people are talking about the economy. People who wouldn't have known a bull market from a bear market, or a junk bond from a mutual fund a year ago are now all experts on Keynesian economics and the theories of Adam Smith. Conversations about the recession, the stock market, and what the government ought to be doing, or ought not to be doing, are unavoidable these days.

I suppose Jesus was the #1 topic of conversation in that way in Jerusalem during a certain Passover celebration about 2000 years ago. Everyone wanted to talk about the smashing young rabbi from Galilee that was causing such a commotion. His preaching upset the religious establishment, but he appealed to the common folk. There were stories of him performing miracles. And he really stirred the pot when he chased the moneychangers out of the Temple. The rumors abounded: Could Jesus be Israel's next king? Could he be the Messiah? Or is he just another fraud? Yes, everybody was talking about Jesus.

Maybe Jesus garnered so much attention because the people of his time were in what might be called a "spiritual recession." I don't want to make light of their situation, or ours, by using clever analogies that actually trivialize the subject matter. But I think it is fair to say that there were and there are both spiritual bankruptcies and financial issues affecting Jesus' time and place and our own.

Judea was controlled by the Roman Empire and the Romans were experts at extracting whatever wealth they could out of the lands they conquered. They allowed the Jewish faith to survive insofar as it didn't interfere too much with their profit taking. That political and economic situation had an affect on the religious scene. The Sadducees pretty much conformed to the Roman culture and remained Jews in name only. The Pharisees went in the other direction and practiced their Jewish faith with its moral and ritual code in the most strident of ways. The Essenes withdrew from society altogether and waited out in the desert for something like Armageddon. And the Zealots mixed their religious beliefs with their plots to violently overthrow the Romans. Spiritually and financially it was not a good situation, and probably not that different from the varieties of political and religious beliefs we find around us today.

Into this powder keg walked Jesus, a man who told his followers to be in but not of the world; a man of peace who couldn't help but challenge the status quo; a charismatic but enigmatic figure no one could quite understand. Jesus didn't come to command an army. Jesus didn't come to revolutionize the monetary system. But he did come for a bailout of sorts.

Some translations of the Lord's Prayer translate the fifth petition to read, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Jesus came to buy up the toxic debt of our sin. He came to take all our transgressions, all our sins upon himself. In doing that, he then took the hit, he took the loss, he forfeited everything he had, even his very life on the cross, so that we might be debt-free in our relationship with God. The happy exchange he made was very much to our advantage. When we were collapsing under the weight of

sin and death, Jesus bailed us out and made us secure once more. That's what his death did, it set us free from the penalty of our sin.

Being bailed out in that way is wonderful, but what happens next. What do we do once we know we are debt-free in regards to sin? Jesus has a stimulus package for us. We are facing some tough financial and spiritual realities these days. We look around and we see institutions that are morally bankrupt. We see people hurting with unemployment, and hunger, and homelessness. Christians just don't set back on their treasuries waiting for a rainier day. Jesus calls us to invest our lives in the world. He calls us to put our skills and talents to use in building up his kingdom. We have to go out and tell others what Jesus has done for us and what he can do for them. We have to go out and help people with their physical and material needs. That's what Jesus' love stimulates us to do.

That can be costly, but no mind. Jesus has deep pockets, deeper than any government agency. He can supply all our needs. He will give us what we need to accomplish the mission he sets before us. He will take care of us, cradle to grave and even beyond the grave. We may not always live the lifestyle we want, or even what we've become accustomed to, but our faith has taught us that Jesus can use us whatever condition we are in. And he will bail us out of our sins as often as we need it.

We can do more than just talk about Jesus. Let his love, let his grace stimulate you into action. Bring a friend to worship next Sunday. Get him or her in on the deal. Come yourself Thursday and Friday this week for a deeper experience of Christ's love. Think about what you can do, how you

can serve God and others. There's a lot of opportunities here. Christ has made you free. He paid it all. The possibilities are endless. Live in newness of life. Amen.