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## Matthew 6:25-34      “How to Respond in a Recession”

Intro. Just a few years ago the economy seemed to be doing quite well. Unemployment was less than 5% nationwide, and about 4% here in Virginia. Inflation has been well under control for some time now. There was a housing boom, fueled by easy credit and low interest rates. Easy credit was not only available for the housing market, but greedy lenders made credit cards readily available to just about everyone.

Yet the boom began to burst about 18 months ago (Dec. '07). Oil prices began to skyrocket. Everything made from oil began to increase sharply. Today, the jobless rate has risen to 9.4%, the highest rate in more than 25 years. Presidents Bush & Obama, along with Congress, have recently appropriated trillions of dollars trying to bail out the failing financial sector, and supposedly to stimulate the economy. Who would have believed 2 years ago that General Motors would file for bankruptcy? Yet it has happened, & most of the company will be owned by the government. Some of our state governments are going broke. Today we are hearing that Social Security is not so secure, and the day it becomes insolvent has recently been moved forward several years. In fact, in about seven years, Social Security will start paying out more in benefits to retirees than it's collecting in taxes from workers. At that point, the system will start drawing on its so called “trust fund,” which is nothing more than an I.O.U. from Congress. They have been borrowing from this fund for years to pay for other government programs.

Folks, the Bible says you reap what you sow, and we as a nation have been sowing greed, corruption, excessive debt, and economic false promises for political gain. We have been violating biblical financial principles for years. Therefore, we are reaping the consequences, and the worst is probably yet to come. We are likely looking at a future with higher interest rates, and more & higher taxes. This in turn will lead to more unemployment, and more economic bad news. Here's something else to consider: this recession is a global recession. The worse matters get in the global economy, the more likely we will see the rise of dictatorships and war. That has been the trend for thousands of years.

Are you worried? How should we respond to an economic recession that could become a depression? Well I hope to answer that question from God's Word this morning. Proverbs 22:3 says, “A prudent man foresees calamity (*ra*) and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished” (27:12 also). So I want you to be prudent, and respond appropriately to what could be an even worsening economy.

So what should you do? First of all:

### I. DON'T WORRY

The economic forecast is not good. Yet the Bible is clear that we should not worry. Three times in this text Jesus commands us not to worry or be anxious, specifically about our material needs and money. After talking about money in vv.19-24, He said in v.25, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on....” He repeats almost the same command in v.31. Then in v.34 He says, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow....” Likewise, Paul said in Php. 4:6, “Be anxious for

nothing....” The Bible does not forbid ordinary, prudent foresight. There is nothing wrong with preparing for a storm, for example. Nor is this a command against healthy concern which causes us to take positive steps in dealing with *today’s* problems. The kind of worry that Jesus has in mind is an undue & chronic concern about potential problems, most of which will never happen.

Now if you think we have reason to worry, that was even more true in Jesus’ day. Sometimes there would be droughts or plagues of locusts, and many would lack food and water for extended periods of time. They did not have a government safety net or bailout programs. They did not have as good of methods to store & transport food. We have even less justification for worry today.

Most people are prone to worry. Therefore, the Lord gives a series of arguments as to why we should not worry. First of all:

A. Worry Demonstrates Misplaced Priorities - Jesus says in the last of v.25, “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” The first reason Jesus gives for not worrying is that physical necessities are not what is most important in life. Jesus said in Luke 12:15 that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Yet man tends to devote his whole life to caring for the externals—his food, his house, his clothes, and so on. Peter, in 1 Pet. 3:3-4a, advised women to put their emphasis, not on outward looks, but on inner beauty. We should be more concerned about character than clothing. While most people are very materialistic, isn’t life more than that? What is more important, you body, or your spirit that lives within your body? What is more important, your house or your family that lives in your house?

It was a hot, 99-degree August day in San Antonio when a ten-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked in a parked car by her aunt. Frantically the mother and the aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. The infant was bawling at the top of its lungs, beginning to turn purple and foam from the mouth, a combination of anxiety and the intense heat inside the car.

It had quickly become a life-and-death situation when Fred Arriola, a tow-truck driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer from his truck and smashed the back window of the car to free the baby. Was he heralded a hero? Not so. According to an article in the *San Antonio Tribune*, he is quoted as saying, “The lady was mad at me because I broke the window. I just thought, ‘What’s more important—a baby or a window?’” [eSermons.com].

Too often we fail to understand what our priorities should be. People are more important than things. Our spiritual life is more important than our material life. Yet if we are worrying about material things, we are revealing that material things are more important to us than our souls.

B. It Is of No Benefit - It doesn’t do any good to worry. Vance Havner said, “Worry is like a rocking chair; it will give you something to do, but it won’t get you anywhere.” Notice what Jesus says about this in our text. He says in v.27 that worry will not add one cubit unto our stature. Some boys playing basketball wouldn’t mind having a foot and a half added to their stature. But even though “cubit...stature” is the more literal rendering of the Greek, the metaphorical meaning would properly be “hour... life” (cf. John 9:21 where it is translated “age”). Worry will certainly not add or prolong your life even one hour.

Not only is worry not beneficial, it is actually harmful. 9 times out of 10 worry does more harm than what you are worrying about. The word for “worry” is *merimnao*, which is from *merizo*, which means to divide into parts. Indeed anxiety distracts and divides internally. When

you worry, you are being pulled in opposite directions. It is the very opposite the word “peace,” which means to bring together, to make whole. Also, the English word “worry” comes for an old German root which means “to choke” or “to strangle.” A man may indeed “worry himself to death.” The Navajos word for worry is not a single word, but is literally translated, “My mind is killing me.”<sup>1</sup> Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; but, ah! it empties today of its strength. It adds new trouble to your life. It does not enable you to escape trouble; it makes you more unfit to cope with it when it comes. As someone said, “A day of worry is more exhausting than a week of hard work.”<sup>2</sup>

Modern science underscores Jesus’ teaching by insisting that worry actually shortens life. Worry leads to loss of sleep, which is so important for good health. Worry can cause ulcers. When you get an ulcer, normally, it’s not what you are eating, it’s what’s eating you. Worry leads to heart disease, which partly results from stress and tension. Worry affects the glands and the whole nervous system. Since worry restricts the flow of saliva, it even leads to an increase in tooth decay.<sup>3</sup>

So as we face this recession, which could get worse, we should not respond by worrying. It does no good. And worrying about material things is putting your attention on something less important than your walk with God.

Now I know that just telling you not to worry will have no effect unless I can get you to substitute something better. And that leads to my second main point. As we face this recession, let us:

## II. TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE

This is what we should do rather than worry. In fact, Jesus said in the last of v.30, “O you of little faith?” When we worry instead of trusting God to provide, we are manifesting “little faith.” At a time like this, we need great faith. The Bible assures us that God has promised to provide for His own. In Php. 4:19 the apostle Paul says, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Psalm 37:25 says, “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.” He does not promise to provide for your wants, but He will provide for your needs. What do you need? Notice what Jesus said in the last of v.32, “For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” He knows, He cares, & He is able to provide. But when you worry about having the necessities of life, you are not exhibiting a confident faith in your loving Heavenly Father. George Mueller once said, “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. The beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.” A confident dependence upon the care and provision of the Heavenly Father banishes anxiety. So as we face this recession, we should trust God to provide.

Look at nature & you will see illustrations of God’s provision. He will provide food. Notice what He says in v.26, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” “Behold” is a stronger form of the verb “look”. It means to fix one’s gaze upon, to consider intently. Have you noticed that birds always seem to have enough to eat. Who has ever seen a

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 378.

<sup>2</sup> R. Whitson Seaman in Pulpit Helps, "Bulletin Inserts".

<sup>3</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #s7558 & 7545* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979);

skinny bird? I realize they have skinny legs, but not skinny bodies! They always seem to have just enough. God provides for them.

Nature also illustrates that God provides clothing. Jesus said beginning in the last of v.28, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Lily is from *krinon*, which probably was a general term for the wild flowers that grew on the hillside they were on. They grow without any toil whatever on their part, nor any care being bestowed on them by any human individual. Yet no garment loomed to the finest and softest texture is anything but rough sackcloth when placed by the side of the drapery with which He clothes the lily. Indeed, Christ is not indulging in hyperbole when He says, “even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

Then He drives home His point. He argues from the lesser to the greater. In the last of v.26 He says, “Are you not of more value than they?” He says in essence, “If God provides for the birds, don’t you think He will provide for you?” No bird was ever made in the image of God, no bird was ever designed to be a joint heir with Christ in heaven. The birds cannot say “Father” and yet they are fed. We are God’s children, and certainly He will provide for His own. The birds know not the hand that feeds them, and yet you can turn around and recognize the source of all blessings. Then He says in v.30, “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” Instead of worrying, we are to trust God to provide. He is trustworthy. He keeps His promises. He loves you, and He is able to provide for all your needs.

Trust in God is no substitute for following sound biblical principles. The Bible says that faith without works is dead. If you really trust God to provide, you will pray as Jesus taught us, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We will work. God provides for the birds, but they have to work gathering their food. If you really trust God, you will give to support His work & help others in need. Why? One reason is due to the biblical promise that God will pour out on you a blessing. If you follow these and other biblical principles that I will show you, God will surely provide for your needs. And that leads to my next point. In the midst of a recession:

### III. PUT GOD FIRST IN YOUR LIFE

What is really important to you? What do you seek? Well Jesus said in v.32, “For after all these things the Gentiles seek.” The unbeliever, the worldly person, seeks after the material things of life: good food, nice clothes, nice cars, and so forth. They only live for the present world of physical reality. In a 3/6/2006 Barna Report, 84% of American adults surveyed *did not* list God as their top priority in life. According to the original language, they diligently seek (*epizeteo*) such things. They are totally consumed in material gratification. In contrast, Jesus said in v.33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness....” “Seek” (*zeteo*) is a present imperative, “Be constantly seeking.” Instead of seeking gold; seek godliness. Instead of seeking riches; seek after righteousness. Christ wants us to set our affection not on things of the earth, but on things above (Col. 3:1). If you put God & His heavenly kingdom first, then God will take care of your earthly needs. In other words, if we first pray, “Thy kingdom come”, then we can pray with faith, “give us our daily bread.” Jesus exhorts His listeners to acknowledge God as King. We should concern ourselves with the kingdom of God. That includes the expansion of the kingdom through evangelism. That means manifesting God’s rule in our own lives. Notice Jesus adds, “and His righteousness.” It stands to reason that when God is recognized as King,

righteousness will prevail. And lastly, it means longing for the Second Coming of Christ to set up a kingdom of righteousness.

It's like buttoning up a sweater. Have you ever buttoned up a sweater and had more sweater left than you had buttons? You looked at it and you found out that you started off wrong. If you get the first button right, then you will be right all the way down. But if you are off on the first button, you will be off all the way down. In life, if you will put Jesus first, all these things will be added unto you. That's the first way to win over worry. Just put Jesus first in your life.

One reason why we should put God first in our lives is stated in the last of v.33, that "all these things shall be added to you." While we concentrate our attention on God, and His kingdom and righteousness, He will see to it that we have food, drink, and clothing. In order to free us to place the priority on the Kingdom of God, He says, "Don't worry about the basics; I'll take care of that." In other words, get your thoughts on the divine level, and God will take care of the physical. "All these things" includes the necessities of life. He does not promise an over abundance of earthly possessions, though He may give us more than we need by His grace. Solomon sought the heavenly things and yet received the earthly as well (I Kings 3:5-13).

May I suggest another reason why you should put God first in your life? If you lose everything of material value, what will you have left? If your life savings is wiped out; if your house burns to the ground; if your car is totaled in an accident, what will you have left? Will you still have the love & loyalty of your family? Will you have Jesus? Even if disaster does not strike, the day is coming when you are going to leave behind everything of material value. That's what happens when you die. At that moment, all that will matter is if you are right with God. Zephaniah 1:18 says, "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath...."

Is v.33 reflected in how you live your life? Do you give God the first day of every week as a day of worship? Do you give God the first part of every day to read His Word & pray? Do you give God the first dime of every dollar? Are you seeking God first?

I have one more brief exhortation for you this morning. As we face a recession:

#### IV. GET YOUR FINANCIAL HOUSE IN ORDER

That phrase comes from 2 Kings 20:1, where we read that King Hezekiah was sick and near death. Then Isaiah the prophet said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order....'"

One good thing about a recession is that, like anything else, God is able to work good from it. A recession is good if it leads us to turn to God and trust Him more. A recession is good if it causes us to reflect on what our priorities should really be. Furthermore, a recession is good if it causes us to get our financial house in order. I wish the government would get their financial house in order. Regardless of what they do, you should get your own financial house in order.

During a recession many people will realize that they have made some financial mistakes. They have spent too much and borrowed too much. Perhaps they have not put enough time and effort in their jobs. I hope you will plan to hear the rest of the messages in this series of sermons, so you can be better equipped to get your financial house in order. Hebrews 11:7, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household...." God warned Joseph that famine was coming to the land of Egypt after 7 years of plenty. So by His providence Joseph was placed in a position where he could lead Egypt to save during the years of plenty, so they would be saved during the years of famine. I

believe it is *likely* that the economy will not get much worse for a while. The next few years could be our last opportunity to get our financial house in order. But in a few years, the economy could get much worse when the American debt grows so great, it will have to lead to hyper inflation or economic collapse. Let us make a commitment to learn the wisdom of God's Word that we may set our financial house in order while we can.

Conclusion: So how should you respond in a recession? You should not respond by worrying. Instead, you should trust God to provide, put His first in your life, and set your financial house in order.

What are you trusting in to get your through the economic storm that may come upon our country, and upon our world? Are you trusting in the government? Or are you trusting in God? After all the governments & economic systems of the world collapse, as told by the book of Revelation, only those who trust in God will be left standing. Do you know Jesus as your Savior? Perhaps God is using present economic uncertainty to bring you to Jesus. Trust Him as Savior today. And put God first in your life. If you care for Him, He will certainly care for you.

Sources: H. Leo Eddleman, *The Teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1975); Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 3, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); John MacArthur, Jr., *Overcoming Materialism: Study Notes on Matthew 6:19-34* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, reprint); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 4/30/89). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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