

Saturday "Sermon"

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Recession: Regression or Advance?

My Dad used to quote a ditty that went, "Two men looked out from the same prison bars. One saw mud, while the other saw stars." Things are not always what they seem, and perspective makes a huge difference in attitude and outcome.

Given this, how shall we understand the current meltdown in our national economy? I suspect that many of us agree with Michael Gerson, a *Washington Post* columnist who wrote this week that "Our current recession has clearly moral causes—the burst of a bubble inflated by irresponsible debt, consumerism, and unaccountable risk-taking." Gerson also observed that "It has always been a quiet fear of capitalists that the success of free markets would eventually undermine the moral basis for free markets."

It was of this danger that George Washington warned in his Farewell Address when he said, "Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." John Adams, our second President, wrote, "It is religion and morality alone which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand." And a decade later, Adams wrote, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

In proclaiming a National Day of Prayer in 1863, Abraham Lincoln wrote that "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God.

"We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us . . . and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us, then to humble ourselves . . . to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

These days of national crisis compel us to confess that as a nation we have "built our house on sand." The good news in such awareness is that we may see how badly we have misunderstood the First Amendment, and may gain a new opportunity to "build our house upon the Rock" (Matthew 7:24-27). His name is Jesus, and if our troubles bring us back to Him, then the journey will have been worth its cost.