

What Debt Crisis?

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I have good news for you in today's article...

On Friday, August 5th 2011, the United States based financial company, Standard & Poor's (S&P), downgraded the US credit rating to AA+.

(that's not the good news).

The downgrade of the U.S. credit rating, accompanied by the sky high national debt is for many a cause for considerable insecurity. Some fear that a lower credit rating for the United States will result in higher interest rates, which will in turn slow the economy and plunge the country into a depression.

Much of the concern over the financial condition of the U.S. is due to our sky rocketing national debt. Since March 1962, the debt ceiling has been raised 74 times, according to the Congressional Research Service. Ten of those times have occurred since 2001. A debt ceiling exists in theory to discourage excessive borrowing, but it has not worked. Congress just votes

to raise the debt ceiling. Since Sept of 2007, the national debt has continued to increase an average of \$3.96 billion per day! The U.S debt is currently over 14 trillion dollars. Assuming that number is accurate, each citizen's share of this debt is \$46,916.90.

Some say the 14 trillion dollar figure is misleading because it does not account for unfunded entitlement programs. (Commitments made by the US legislature that are not currently funded within the congressional budget). If the unfunded entitlement programs are figured into the equation, our national debt, (according to Richard Fisher, president of the Dallas Federal Reserve), is closer to 100 trillion dollars, or \$330,000 per person. But whether we take the “low” number or the “high” number, our national debt is excessive and continually growing.

Many say we are mortgaging our children’s future. Sometimes I wonder if anyone is rich enough to pay off the debt.

According to Forbes Magazine, March 2011 there are currently 1,210 billionaires in the world. Their combined total worth is: (\$4.5 trillion), which, (depending on which national debt figure you use), amounts somewhere between 4.5 to 30% of our national debt; so even the richest billionaires in the world cannot afford to pay off the U.S. national debt.

Who will remove the debt that hangs over the head of us and our children? Can the U.S ever be freed from this kind of economic enslavement; this unwanted American birthright? The government insists the debt has to be repaid, while others insist the debt exists only in computers and can be “wiped away with a keystroke”. While I relish the idea of the national debt being wiped away, I do not anticipate this will happen in our lifetimes. I think it is much more likely that the citizens of the Unites States will continue to pay considerable interest in the national debt for their entire lives.

The debt of the U. S. is, and will remain, a burden carried by us and by our children. To paraphrase some Old Testament scripture: ‘The fiscal sins of this generation will be visited upon our children and their children from generation to generation.’

I know, still no good news...

But wait it gets *worse*...we have more than just financial debt; we have a 'sin debt' as well.

Our personal sin debt is so immense it is greater than the entire national debt. We have been born into a sinful world. We have adopted sinful ways; and our sin has broken the perfection of the world.

We have 'messed up' God's perfect creation in two significant ways: our sin adversely affects the overall 'goodness' of the world, and our sin adversely affects our souls. The Bible tells us that the world and everything in it belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). Since our sin damages this world, every sin damages God's perfect creation.

It would be nice if we would both recognize and fix the damage our sin has done to God's creation. It would be nice if we could pay off our own 'sin debt.' Yet in reality we are incapable of making full restitution. First, because we do not recognize the vast majority of our sins (1 Corinthians 13:12). And secondly because sin has far reaching consequences. No one can know how the ripples of their sin reverberate through the universe. We can no more correct our sin than we can un-ring a bell.

I usually have coffee in the morning with milk. Last week I decide to have it black instead, but out of habit I put milk in my coffee anyway. Even though I regretted adding the milk, I was unable to extricate the milk from the coffee. So too we cannot extricate our sin from the universe, or from our souls. The domino like effect of our sin is cancerous to all of God's creation.

Because our sin causes infinitely wide ranging damage, we are incapable of making proper restitution. Even if were we to die to pay our sin debt, it would be an insufficient payment. The death of Talaat Pasha did not balance the books on the Armenian Genocide, nor did the death of Adoph Hitler make the holocaust 'alright'. In fact the consequence of one sin is so infectious,

in order for sufficient payment to be made, an infinite payment would be required.

(Okay... here comes the good news)...

We believe Jesus was, and is, God in the flesh (He is God together with His Father and the Holy Spirit). This Jesus, who we confess to be infinite God, came to earth for many reasons, but the main reason was this: to take care of the infinite “sin-debt” issue.

In a just world, or a righteous world, debts are paid off. Just as one person can pay off another’s mortgage or car loan, so too Jesus, as God in the flesh, came to pay off our “sin debt”. He came to pay off what we owe God for our sins; for messing up God’s perfect creation. During Badarak we say that the Son offers himself to the Father for reconciliation, or in the Armenian, “hashdootyoun” (accounting). When Jesus, the infinite one, died on the cross he settled all accounts for all time. No longer would anyone ever owe a ‘sin debt’ again.

In addition He rose and went to heaven. Our hymnography tells us that he went to heaven to “sprinkle the universe with his blood.” That is to say, the effect of his perfect and infinite sacrifice somehow, mysteriously, “makes all things new” (Revelation 21:5, 1 John 1:7).

Because of what Jesus did, your sin, and its effects, are ultimately wiped away. Your sin debt is no more. You have been saved by the blood of Christ. This renewal applies to each and everyone of us.

When we take communion each Sunday we are accepting the payment Jesus made. We are receiving His sacrifice. We are saying, ‘thank you for paying off my sin-debt, I accept this payment and want to live in communion with you.’

While this ‘cosmic payment’ for sin sounds like a nice idea, or a potentially plausible theory, some question its validity. Some wonder whether or not Jesus’ ‘paying for our sins’ is a right teaching. But for us who use the title ‘Christian,’ the ultimate confirmation of Jesus’ claims was his resurrection. The fact that he came back from the dead was the ultimate validation of the truth of his teachings. The apostles and the over 500 others who witnessed the risen Lord went

throughout the world spreading the good news of spiritual debt relief, aka spiritual freedom that was, and is ours in Christ.

The consequence of Jesus' debt relief is that the 'sin debt' has been removed from us. He has balanced the books. He has somehow, spiritually, offered us a debt free life and a clean spiritual bill of health; for, (the Bible teaches us that) when we receive communion in faith we are mysteriously cleansed by His blood (1 John 1:7).

The upshot of all this is that by his actions he has made it possible for us to be cleansed of sin and to enter heaven.

While Jesus' dying on the cross and rising from the dead is overwhelming evidence of His love for us, we have another wonderful example in church history as to the power of the risen Lord. Jesus claimed to have the power to take people into heaven. On the feast of the Assumption of our Mary we remember that Jesus not only said he had the power to raise the dead to heaven, he also demonstrated that power.

After Jesus rose, Mary lived in Jerusalem about 15 years, then she fell asleep in Christ. The apostles, (all except Bartholemew who was travelling at the time), gathered around the tomb and prayed. For three days and three nights they, and many devout Christians, kept vigil. Angelic singing was heard around the tomb. At one point while they were praying, the apostles saw a vision of Jesus descending from heaven and lifting his mother out of the tomb and taking her to heaven. St. Bartholemew returned three days after Mary's passing. He asked to see her body. They opened the tomb and discovered the body was not there. From this we confess that Jesus indeed raised his mother to eternal life in heaven.

So not only has Jesus removed our sins, by His resurrection, he has also conquered death; and by raising Mary he has demonstrated he has the power to bring someone to heaven.

Jesus not only paid off our sin debt, he also made it possible for us to enter into heaven. Let us therefore approach the chalice each Sunday with hearts full of thanksgiving, knowing that our Lord has made all things right; and let us seek to live in communion with the expiator of our sins, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom together with His Father and Holy Spirit is befitting glory, dominion and honor now and forever; from this age, into the age that is to be

established at the time of His second coming.

To Him be eternal glory!