

RECOVERY.US
We The People
September 25, 2011

Good morning everyone. Isn't it fun to have fun in church. It's cool that we could do that this morning. Great job everyone.

As Kitti said, today we're beginning a two-week series dealing with the economy which I realize might be a little bit of an unusual topic to hear about in church. But part of what we try to do around here is to bring a Christian and biblical perspective to the kinds of issues that affect real life ... and few things have had a more pervasive effect on our real lives than the financial turmoil in the past several years. Just this past week, I'm sure you're aware, the stock market lost as much as it did in 2008 when the meltdown began. As one commentator put it the other night, and I think he said it well, he said,

economically, we are simply in chaos and it's hard to escape that fact.

And so, I think part of our responsibility as a church and part of my responsibility as a pastor is that, whenever the culture intersects with scripture, we need to talk about it. Not that that happens every week, but, every once in a while, something big happens that causes us and requires us to hit the pause button and say, "you know what? You have an opinion about what's going on, I have an opinion about what's going on, and 'they' (whoever 'they' may be) have an opinion about what's going on, but *Jesus* has an opinion, too ... and I've got to tell you, here's his opinion on this." And *Jesus* does have an opinion on our current economic situation and we're going to look at it this week and again next week.

In addition, this current situation is unique in

that it allows us the opportunity to view our politics through the filter of our faith. Typically, we tend to do it the other way around – we tend to look our faith through the filter of our politics. A lot of Christians in our country look at a situation like we're currently in and say, "I'm a Republican, I'm a Democrat, I'm a Tea-Partier, I'm a Libertarian, I'm an everything, I'm a nothing and because of that, here's what I think needs to happen in this current situation."

But this economic mess is an *amazing opportunity* for us to say, "yes, this is my political persuasion but, as a Christian, as a follower of Christ, I'm going to try to set that aside as much as possible and I'm going to ask the question, 'what would my Heavenly Father have me think and do in this particular time? What should the church do in a situation like this in our country?'"

And the final reason I want to do this series is there are a lot of Christians living in fear and apprehension over what might happen in our economy. I know that because it creeps up on me, as well, sometimes. And I think we need to be reminded that the source of our provision is not whatever administration is in power in Washington DC. The source of our provision, if we are followers of Jesus, is God - a loving God who cares for us so much that He will provide for us and take care of us. And I think we need to be reminded of that.

So, that's why we're doing this series. So, let's get into it. And as we do, I want to give credit where credit is due. What I'm about to share with you is not entirely original with me. This message I'm about to give was inspired and is based on a message by Andy Stanley of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia. And when I

heard this I was doing some research a couple of months ago about the economy and thinking that we just need to talk about this. And while doing research I came across Dave Ramsey's website, The Great Recovery, and Andy was on there. Andy had this message that was just so "on the money" (pun intended) that I decided, "I need to take what Andy said and apply it to my own life and then put it in words that apply to us and speak it to you all" because I need to hear it and I think you all need to hear it as well. I just want to be clear about where some of this comes from.

How Could This Happen?

I want you to think about the last time you read in the paper or heard on the news about some rich and famous rock-star, or athlete, or movie-star who had made millions and millions of dollars and as they

hit middle-age or later, they went bankrupt. Or maybe someone who won the lottery, millions and millions of dollars, and 10 years later, they're destitute and on the street.

What do you think when you hear these kinds of stories? I know what I think and I bet you do, too. Two things, actually:

1. *How could that happen?* How could somebody make far more money than I'll ever make and then blow it all and have to declare bankruptcy – lose their homes, lose their airplane, lose stuff I'll never own? How could that happen?
2. *If it was me in that situation, that would not have happened.* If I had that much opportunity; if I was that famous; if I was that rich, I would not let that happen in my life. Isn't that true? Don't we think those kinds of things?

Now, think about this, let's switch the venue a little bit. When's the last time you heard about a big corporation that everybody knows about; it's a household name and it goes bankrupt. For example, let's take Circuit City. For years and years, in this country, Circuit City was *the* electronics store in this nation.

When you find out that a company like that is falling apart, what do you think (especially if you're a business person)? You think "how could that happen?" And if you're a business person you also think "that wouldn't happen on my watch. If I was the president or the CEO, I would not have let that happen. I mean, a company has to work so hard to reach that kind of status, there is no way, if I was calling the shots, that would have happened."

Now, step way back from those two scenarios – the famous people and the famous companies – and ask this: *The United States of America almost bankrupt?* Are you kidding? How can that happen? We can't imagine how that would happen to an individual. We can't imagine how that would happen to Circuit City or K-Mart or the Los Angeles Dodgers. So, how in the world could the US of A have the kind of financial problems that we have right now? We're the standard everyone else in the world looks up to. We're the example everyone else wants to emulate. When the rest of the world looks at the USA right now do you know what they think? They think about that famous person or that successful company that just went belly-up. They look at us and ask, "How could that happen to them?" And they're flabbergasted, and we should be flabbergasted as well.

So, how did it happen? How did we end up in such a financial crisis? Before I answer that, let me let you in on two secrets.

1. First of all, at the root, *our financial crisis is not financial.*

It's kind of like when you start looking at the details of all those famous people who made millions and then went bankrupt, or you look at the companies that get into trouble, and you really understand the situation and you realize it was not a cash flow problem in either situation; in the case of the individual, it was a *spending* problem; in the case of the company, it was a management problem.

See, it's amazing how individuals and companies and nations think that they can ignore the fundamental principles year after year after year, and then when it finally catches up with them, they say, "Oh, we

have a financial crisis here!" Truth is ... it's not really a financial crisis. It's just that no one was paying attention to the problems until they became financial. It's only a crisis when it hits our wallet. But then you scratch beneath the surface and you realize "this isn't really a financial crisis." This is a crisis of a different kind.

And where this all intersects with the scripture is in the simple principle you've heard a thousand times if you've been to church at all in your life: *we're simply reaping what we've sown*. And when you begin to reap what you have sown, the tendency of human nature is to look at recent events for someone or something to blame. I mean, turn on the news and what do you hear? "It's the Obama administration that sowed the seed of this crisis." "Oh, no, it wasn't! It was the Bush administration."

That's just human nature. But mature people, Christian people, rise above human nature. We don't look for someone to blame. We don't point fingers. Mature people realize, "you know what? We've *all* been sowing this for years and years and, now, we're all reaping it. And if there's going to be a solution, it's going to take all of us involved."

That's the first secret. Here's the second one ...

2. Our problems as a nation don't stem from a lack of prosperity.

If you look all over the world it doesn't take long to realize that there is no place in the world like this country. "Only in America," like the song said. You might find a more beautiful place but in terms of a place with resources like we have and a strategic

location like we have (from sea-to-shining-sea) and a free-enterprise system to make use of those things, the USA is the place to be. We do not have a prosperity problem.

What we have is an *abuse of prosperity* problem. And it's caught up with us. We're reaping what we've sown.

So, with that in mind, here are four contributing factors as to how we got into this mess. And I'm sure you can think of more than these four, but this is a good place to start.

1. We have a discipline problem.

Now, you know what a discipline problem is if you have kids. They want to do something and you say "no" and they do it anyway. That's a discipline problem.

And you and I live in a culture that doesn't like to hear the word "no." So, what we have done year after year after year is we have reached into the future as a nation and we have leveraged that future financially so that we can have what we want to have *now*. That's a discipline problem.

Have you noticed that whenever you have more of something than you need, you're almost never disciplined with it? This country has been so prosperous and so blessed and we've had so much of what we need that we've not needed to be disciplined. So, we've developed a lifestyle both personally and nationally where we simply lack discipline. We do not take "no" for an answer. And if somebody tries to *tell* us no, what do we do, we get rid of them and we elect somebody who will say "yes" – that's the American way. So, now we have a political system full of people who are trying

to say "yes" to everyone and, now, were reaping what we've sown in that.

In addition to the discipline problem ...

2. We have an entitlement problem.

And I don't mean "entitlement spending." This is not a political statement. It's an entitlement problem.

Here's what I mean by the word "entitlement." That's a word that is fairly recent in our vocabulary as a nation. Before, the word that was used for entitlement was *Spoiled*. Spoiled

And that's us. We're spoiled. Everybody in this country, everybody in this room, including me, everybody we know ... we all feel entitled. We all feel like "you owe me." And why do you owe me? "Because I'm

breathing, aren't I? Because I'm an American, and Americans are owed." We come up with *all kinds of reasons* why "you owe me if you're my employer" or "you owe me if you're my parents" or "you're the government? You owe me because I'm a citizen." We are unbelievably *spoiled*.

"Come on, Rick. Aren't you being a little too harsh here?"

Well, let me ask you, have you ever been to a third-world country? How many people have ever visited a third-world country? I have been several times. And every time I've gone, I've watched and I've said, "wow, these people have so little and yet they're so happy." Anybody else ever have that reaction? So, then what happens is, I come back and for a couple of days I'm looking at my stuff and I'm just so thankful, "God, I can't believe you have blessed me so richly."

But it doesn't take long until I'm upset about some gadget that doesn't work just right or the fact my lawn service company didn't take care of the grubs or the fungus and now I've got brown patches in my lawn. Oh the shame of it!"

I'm spoiled. I'm entitled to a green lawn. And so are you. And this is part of how we got here.

Another reason we are where we are these days is that ...

3. We have a greed problem.

You know what greed is? I like how Andy Stanley defines it. He says "greed is the assumption that everything that comes your way is for your consumption." Greed is the assumption that if it gets placed into my hands, it's meant for my consumption.

Do you know how you can tell that America has a greed problem? Because statistics have shown for year after year that the more money you make in this country, the less percentage of that money you give away. On the other hand, the poorer you are, the greater your percentage, the more generous you are. That is an indication of national greed. With only a few notable exceptions, the richest people give away the least, percentage wise.

You know what that means? That means their assumption – our assumption – is that whatever gets placed into my hands because either I worked for it or I inherited it – if it gets in my hands, it is there for *my consumption*.

Greed is an abuse of prosperity. And it's part of the reason we are where we are as a

nation.

One more thing on the list ...

4. We have a failure-of-nerve problem.

Failure of nerve is whenever a leader – a parent, a politician, a business owner, a pastor, a manager – looks at a situation, recognizes what the problem is, recognizes what the solution might be but fears the consequence of doing what they know they need to do ... and they back down. That's a failure of nerve. You get right up to the edge, see the solution but then you start thinking about the feedback, the pushback, what might happen to your popularity, your support, your funding, your approval rating ... and because of the fear of what you might lose *personally*, you decide not to address the real problem.

And in this country, we have a national failure of nerve problem. Part of it is just because of the way our political system is set up – our presidents are on the line every four years. They've got to please everybody. The Congressmen and women are elected and can stay there forever, funded by the same people during their entire career and at some point, they realize they dare not rock the boat too much lest they lose the thing that keeps them there. And so, instead of addressing the real issues, they talk around the problems or throw money at problems.

Jesus Speaks

Now, when you look at that kind of list, the four things we just talked about, here's what happens ...

- If you're a Democrat you think, "Yeah, you're right. Those Republicans, they're

so greedy." And you pick up a stone to throw.

- And if you're a Republican, you think, "Yeah, those Democrats. They're so entitled." And you pick up a stone.
- And if you're a Libertarian, you think, "Those Republicans and Democrats have been in power so long that they've lost their nerve to do what needs to be done." And you pick up a stone.
- And if you're a Tea-Partier you pick up a stone along with the Libertarians but you write a Bible verse on yours because Tea-Party people are all Christians, right?

You hear a list like that and here's what happens: everything I've said so far goes through the filter of your own political

persuasion. While I'm talking, you're thinking, "yeah, that's exactly right, Rick. That's why I'm a Republican." Or, "that's exactly right, Rick, that's why I'm a Democrat. If President Bush hadn't done what he did we wouldn't be in this mess. Or, "Yeah, that's exactly why we've got to vote President Obama out of office next year. Yea, Rick, you're right. I so love this church! You always agree with me." I mean, some of you are thinking that, right?

So, we all reach down and we've got our stones and because of our political persuasions; it's their fault and we're just about to start stone them ... and Jesus enters and says, "Before you do that, I have something I need to say to you."

And, since it's Jesus and since we're all Christians here, we decide to listen – but we're not going to put our stones down just

yet - we're going to listen to what he says.

And all of us Republicans, we're so glad that Jesus is here because we *know* that Jesus is going to support our position. Jesus is Republican – everyone knows that, right? And all the Democrats, we're so glad Jesus is here because Jesus is for the poor and the downtrodden and He had a single mom. So, we're for Jesus, too. We want him to speak because Jesus is going to support our position.

But the Bible tells us that Jesus would often walk into these kinds of situations where people wanted Him to say "it's left" or "it's right" or "it's black" or "it's white." They were constantly trying to pin him down: "Jesus, are you liberal or are you conservative? Jesus, are you for this or are you against this?"

And Jesus would so often say "there's a third option you have not yet considered and you are not yet aware of." And people would get mad. "That doesn't help our cause. You've got to pick a side." And a lot of people, when they got to that point, they turned against Jesus, and said, "I'm not following him."

And, today, if Jesus walked into this room that's made up of Republicans and Democrats and Libertarians and Independents and so-on and so-on, I think He would say to us, "before you throw that stone; before you bash this current administration or you bash the previous administration; before you blame the Tea Party or you blame the do-nothing Congress ... I have something to say to you."

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Matthew 7:3 (TNIV)

"Oh, oh, oh ... I know the answer to this, Jesus. Because it makes me feel empowered. It makes me feel right. It makes me feel better-than. And I really don't have to do anything different in my life."

Good answer. Anyone else?

"Why do you focus on the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye when you have a plank sticking out of your own?"

"Well, Jesus, I *don't have* a plank sticking out of my own eye. That's why. Because I'm *right*."

And we're all the same in that. We're all *right*. I mean, nobody sitting here this morning thinks they're wrong, do we? None of us would be wrong on purpose. "Well, I

have the wrong view and I'm going to hold onto it." No, we all believe we're right.

So, when Jesus asks, "why is it that you're so concerned about his speck or her speck and you won't look in the mirror at the plank sticking out of your own eye?" the real answer is that *I don't believe I have a plank sticking out of my eye.*

But Jesus goes on anyway:

How can you say, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Matthew 7:4 (TNIV)

To which we answer again, "Jesus, I'm not aware of any plank in my eye."

To which Jesus is about to say "do you know how I know there is a plank in your eye? It's *because you are so focused on that little*

speck in someone else's eye."

He says:

*You hypocrite! Matthew
7:5 (TNIV)*

And here's what's really, really important to understand about that word. When people read this passage, what they think Jesus is trying to say here is "don't be critical of others because you know, you have some issues in your life, as well. You're hypocritical if you're pointing your finger at them and you've got your own issues." No, that's not what Jesus is saying. What He is saying is "watch out in your criticism of others because you have the same issues they do."

"Oh no, I don't, Jesus. I was raised a Democrat. My Grandpa was a Democrat and his grandpa was a Democrat. I don't

have any of those Republican issues in my eye.”

And yet Jesus says, “you hypocrite.”

So, let’s talk about what a hypocrite is? A hypocrite is someone who expects something of someone else that they themselves are not willing to do. A hypocrite is somebody who accuses somebody of not doing something or doing something that *they themselves* are guilty of doing or are refusing to do. *They have the same issue.* You cannot be a hypocrite unless you’ve weighed in on what everybody else should do and you’re not doing that yourself. Does that make sense?

By calling us hypocrites, Jesus is saying here “if you’re focused on the speck in somebody else’s eye, and it’s really really bugging you, chances are whatever you don’t like in them,

there's some of that in you, as well." We'll come back to that in just a bit.

But Jesus continues ...

You hypocrite ...

First ...

And, that's a really important word. First ... first ... because this is where recovery begins, this is where change begins ... do you want to see the people in office change? ... first ... do you want to see the country change? First ...

... take the plank out of your own eye.

Well, that's no fun! I can't get all worked up over that. I can't have a party at my house and say, "friends, we're not going to turn on the television and bash Fox News

commentators or CNN commentators. I just want you guys to help me get the plank out of my eye." Where's the fun in that. Who wants to do that?

What Jesus is saying is that *when something about you bothers me, I need to take a long hard look at me before bothering you*. If we did that, friends, that could change everything.

I mean, I know what Republicans think. "They think, Democrats, why don't you people just look in the mirror?" And Democrats say, "Republicans, if you could see yourselves the way I see you ..."

And Jesus says "you know, that's a great idea. Let's all turn off our TVs. Let's stop listening to all the noise. Let's all take a look in the mirror and say, 'hmmm ... that stuff that drives me crazy about those left-

wingers, is there any of that in me? That stuff that drives me crazy about those Tea Partiers, is there any of that in me?'"

And of course, you don't think there is. Because, if you did, you would have already dealt with it. But Jesus says, if it really ticks you off and drives you crazy, that's an indication there might be a plank sticking out of your eye.

Now, this next part of what he says ... it's so brilliant. So far Jesus has said, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye ..."

This next part he makes a promise to you, to your family, to your company, to your friends and even to our nation.

"If you take the plank out of your own eye

...

... then you will see clearly to
remove the speck from the
other person's eye."
Matthew 7:5 (TNIV)

You and I think the problem with the other person or the other party is that they don't see things the way they really are. They don't see clearly. And they think you don't see clearly, as well.

To both sides Jesus says "would you like to see clearly?" To which all of us say "we already see clearly." And Jesus says "no, you don't see clearly."

Jesus says "would you like to see clearly? Would you like the other party to see clearly? Would you like the nation to see clearly? Would you like everybody to go 'ohhhh, now I see what needs to be done'?" "Well, here's an idea," Jesus says, "go home and look in the mirror. And look specifically for that thing

that drives you crazy about the other group. And then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of their eye.”

And they *do* have something in their eye. That’s the point. We all have something in our eye. But when you have two people with logs in their eyes trying to take the log, or the speck, out of the other person’s eye, you just end up putting each other’s eyes out... and that is why the debate in this country is so harsh and critical and cutting. It’s sickening. That’s part of the problem.

And that’s why the first principle of recovery has to be this:

The road to recovery in the United States begins with “we” not “they.”

That’s what Jesus is saying. And, that principle is true in your family, true in your business, true in your marriage – true

everywhere. The road to recovery, the way forward always begins with me not you. It begins with we not they.

Now, if you're a church person, here, this is for you. You've got to take what Jesus is saying very seriously. If you're not a church person, not a follower of Jesus, you can say, "that's interesting. I'll have to think about that. It's kind of an optional thing." But if you're a church person, a follower of Jesus, you don't have any option but to pay attention to what he's saying here.

And what's amazing about what he is saying is that there are enough followers of Jesus in the United States that if we just got this one thing right, if we just focused on this one thing - look at ourselves and start with "we" instead of "they" - it would have a huge impact on the whole financial system, on the level of hostility in the dialogue and the

conversation about our problems, and the ability to actually implement changes that everybody knows needs to happen. The road to recovery begins with “we” not “they.”

“We” Questions

So, what does that look like Rick? How does it begin with “we” and not “they” practically speaking? Well, I think we just do what Jesus said. We look in the mirror and we ask ourselves some “we” questions that I don’t many of us will like. I know I don’t like these questions, but, we need to ask them.

Here’s the first one.

1. Are *you* undisciplined with *your* money?

“Yeah, but it’s my money.”

Oh, so that’s different? “No,” Jesus says,

“That’s a plank that’s sticking out of your eye.”

See, if you’re not saving, if you’re spending up to the edge of your income, if you’ve got stupid consumer debt, if you owe money on stuff you don’t even remember buying, ... if you have been irresponsible with your own personal money, you lose leverage when you start pointing your finger at the government for being irresponsible with taxpayer money? And that’s true whether you’re a liberal or a conservative. If you are you living beyond your means, I love you, but you are part of the problem. Uncle Sam is just doing as you have been doing.

Can you imagine what would happen in our country if just the Christians decided “let’s get serious about this. Let’s get our own financial house in order instead of looking at everybody else’s and the government’s.

From now on, as Christians, we're going to purchase only what we can afford. We're going to live within our means. We're going to give first, save second, and live on the rest and stay out of stupid consumer debt." That would shift the entire economy of this nation. It really would.

Here's the second question:

2. Are you greedy?

"Of course I'm not greedy, Rick. I'm not rich."

Let me ask you, does 98.5% of what gets placed in your hands end up getting spent on your lifestyle? On your *little circle* of family and friends? Is it your assumption that whatever is in those hands is for your consumption? That's greed. That is an abuse of your personal financial prosperity.

Do you know what would happen in this country if every Christian (I'm talking about people who say "Jesus is my savior and I'm trying to follow him") in this nation decided "I'm not going to be like *an average* American and give 1.5% of my income away each year. I'm going to be like a *Christian* American and I'm going to give away a significant percentage of what God blesses me with." Do you know what that would do in our communities? Do you know what that would do in our churches? Do you know what that would do in *this* church? It would happen, not because of *they*, the government, it would happen because of *we*. And, friends, I'm not stupid, I'm not blind, I know the economy isn't great right now. But, let's just get straight on this, our capacity as Christians in this country financially - if we did give, save, live, like the Bible says - our capacity is unbelievable in

spite of the double-dip recession.

But the truth is, most of us are too greedy.
Most of us are too greedy.

Here's another question:

3. Are you paying your taxes?

Or are you stealing from me and everyone else in this country? If you are a Christian and you're not paying your taxes, you are a hypocrite. You are part of the problem. *Pay your taxes.* "But, the government is wasting our money."

You know, Jesus already answered this question. I'm sure you know this, right? One day the disciples came to him and asked, "Should we pay our taxes? Should we pay Caesar? He's a corrupt ruler." And Jesus pulled out a coin and said, "Who's picture is

on this?" And, they said, "Well, that's Caesar's picture." And Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's – and by the way, Caesar gets to determine how much of it he gets, not you – and he gets to determine what he is going to do with it, not you. But you pay your taxes. You give to Caesar what is Caesar's and then you give to God what is God's."

How about this one?

4. Men, are you taking responsibility for the children you brought into this world?

... with a woman or women you're not married to any longer, or never were married to? Have you insured the future of those children like you are obligated to? Are you paying child support to your ex-wife or to the women who had your babies? If not and you're a Christian, you are a hypocrite. You're a major part of the problem in our

culture because one of the primary causes of poverty in this country is related to that very thing.

If you are not insuring the future of your kids, you've lost all right to say anything about the problem of poverty in this country. Your behavior is part of what drives it. That's your plank.

Oh, boy, this next one is hard.

5. Are you on disability but you know you could work?

Don't hear what I'm not saying. If you're truly disabled and you can't work, I'm not talking to you. I'm talking about Christians who really are able to work but are choosing not to.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, said "when we were with

you, we were not a burden to anyone. We worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.”ⁱ That’s what Christians do. They don’t take advantage of the system.

Next question ...

6. Are there things in your family you know you need to confront, but you won’t?

Are you scared of your teenager? (You should be) Scared of your college student? Scared of your wife? Scared of your husband? Are there things in your family that need to be addressed, but you just keep backing away from the edge?

And I know that some of you have really hard situations and I don’t want to make light of that, but this is the very same thing that we see in our government. It’s the very same thing that gets passed down

generationally in leadership. It's part of the problem.

Final question, mercifully ...

7. Are you stealing from your employer?

Are you inflating your expense reports? That's one way of doing it. Or, are you giving less than your best effort? Are you just waiting around to be told what to do instead of taking the initiative, going above and beyond what's expected? Adding to the productivity of your company or your employer instead of just coasting along?

The New Testament tells Christians to give our best efforts to our work as if we were working for the Lord and not for a human boss, because that's the truth of it. Friends, you're not working for Hallmark, you're not working for AT&T, you're not even working

for yourself, or for KCMO, or for North Heartland, if you work here. You are working for Jesus, and he deserves the best effort that you can give.

Ok, that's the list. But before we put it away, I want you to notice something. Republicans and Democrats and Libertarians and Independents, all of them steal from their employers. Liberals and conservatives and moderates, they all don't pay taxes or child support. You see what I'm getting at? These things are not political issues – these are American problems. These are *our* problems.

It Begins With We

Can you imagine what would happen in our country if *just the Christians* began to

address just these few issues that we've talked about? *We would recover.* We would recover past any place that we've ever been before. There would be so much more money available to take care of people within our congregations, within our communities; there would be so much less poverty.

See, the truth is that we do not have a financial problem in our country. We have a discipline problem; a greed problem; an entitlement problem; a failure-of-nerve problem and the solution to those problems do not begin in Washington. It does not begin with who gets to be called "Mr. President" after the next election.

It begins in your home and in mine and in your lifestyle and in mine. It begins in this community and in this church. It begins here and it begins now because, at the end of the

day, the road to recovery doesn't begin with "they." This has nothing to do with legislation or elections. This has everything to do with behavior – our behavior. The road to recover begins with "we" not "they."

And if you're a follower of Jesus, my invitation to you this morning is to repent (change your mind), and believe the good news of what Jesus said: *that if you'll address the plank in your own eye, then you'll see clearly enough to help not only yourself, but you will, but also to help the people around you.* That's how we'll make progress in our communities and progress in our nation once again.

But it doesn't begin with "they." It begins with me and it begins with you. It begins with "we the people."

Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, that kind of look in the mirror is no fun because the truth is ugly. The truth is that we've been blaming others, we've been arrogant, and we've been pointing our fingers, and we are doing the same things ourselves. We are hypocrites. It's the truth.

And, God, we're so thankful this morning that we don't come to you as condemned sinners, but we come forgiven, even of those things, even of things we don't even understand about those things in our lives. We are so thankful that we are forgiven because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, and there is no condemnation. But, God, we want to be more than just forgiven. We want to be the kind of people You want us to be in this world. We want to be the salt and the light that

brings change. Not because as Christians we banded together and made some coalition to change a law or a system or a president, but You helped us to change our behavior. It starts with us God. And I pray that You would help us to do just that. I pray that You would give us the power to do what we need to do and to be the people You want us to be.

We thank You for loving us. We thank You for Jesus and that he covers even our economic sin and then calls us to a new way of life. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Worship

Now, we're going to close this morning with a worship song. We're going to do this because the change that we're talking about

here is not "okay, we're all going to suck it up try really hard." This is something that we turn to God and say, "God, we are sinners. We need Your grace; we need Your power." So, this song is kind of an expression of that, of turning to God and saying, "God, You are the source. We're going to trust You and we're going to live out of You instead of what we think is best." And as we do this song we're going to receive the offering this morning. And the reason we're going to do this – and I know a lot of times we pass the plate and we don't make a big deal out of the plate – but, we have a greed problem in this country. We have a greed problem. *Christians* have a greed problem. If you're not a Christian, this is not you. You let that basket pass, okay? But, we have a greed problem and God's antedote to greed is generosity; it's giving. And some of us need to give. And this morning as that comes by, you may say, "God, I only have 75¢ in my

pocket and that's what's going in." You may have more, whatever. That's why we're doing it this way because we want to respond to God in that way. So, let's stand and sing and then we'll be done.

Thank you for being here this morning. Tough message. Tough message to speak. Tough message to apply to myself, and, I dare you to come back next week. Seriously, next week the topic is: The Upside of a Down Economy. And there are some things that God can do in your life and in mine in this kind of a situation that He cannot do in other times. So, that's what we're going to talk about next week. I think you'll be a little more encouraged than you are this morning, because I think the Holy Spirit was speaking pretty hard to some of us this morning.

But, thank you for being here. I hold you in high regard for listening to what God says.

So, get out of here. See ya. Love ya.

Endnotes

ⁱ 2 Thessalonians 3:8