

## ***OINK-ONOMICS***

**Acts 4:32-37**  
**September 27, 2009**  
**Dr. Rick Jensen**

**First Christian Church**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

Well, I just couldn't resist—not that I really tried. I had to tune in to last Sunday night's Dallas Cowboys-New York Giants game. Understand I *really don't care* about the Cowboys or the Giants. I'm a Chiefs fan. I don't care that dashing Chris Collinsworth replaced the legendary John Madden as color commentator. No, what lured me to tune in had nothing to do with the game. It was *the stadium!* Yes, *the Dallas Cowboys brand new \$1.2 billion (not "M" as in million but "B" as in billion) stadium.*

Make no mistake. This stadium is, as billionaire Cowboys' owner Jerry Jones says, "the best of the best;" or at least the biggest of the biggest. The stadium sports the largest HDTV screen in the world: 7 stories high and 60 yards wide, stretching from 20 yard line to 20 yard line. And, oh yes, did I mention it's really 2 screens not one; facing fans sitting on both sidelines? If the stadium were tilted on end it would rise as high as the Empire State Building. And, the stadium contains 2 sets of end zones with retractable glass doors that are 120 feet high and 180 feet wide, making them the tallest such doors in the world. All this, award winning *Dallas Morning News* writer Matt Motley calls "a tribute to excess," adding the operation of the

stadium has a “burn rate,” a negative cash flow of...drum roll...\$1 million per day! All so Jerry Jones’ legacy can be this monument to himself!<sup>1</sup>

Welcome, friends, to the world of “OINK-onomics,” of conspicuous consumption, of remarkable excess, and of concentration of wealth based upon greed. We see it everywhere these days: One billionaire who lost money when the Las Vegas’ real estate market crashed is economizing by using his small private jet instead of the big one. This last week the Monaco Yacht Convention was held exhibiting luxury planes, helicopters and yachts the size of battleships worth millions upon millions of dollars!

Of course, you may be wondering: “What is this word “OINK-onomics?” If you haven’t heard it before it’s because I made it up. But it’s very close to our word “economics,” which like the words “ecology” and “ecumenical” begins with the prefix E-C-O(U). This prefix comes from the Greek “*oikos*,” meaning “household.” So, the word “economics” literally means “household rules or laws.” OINK-onomics, on the other hand, breaks the social contract that binds us to one another in the household of God, as represented in our text from Acts where all held everything in common.

Thing is: economics, the fair trade of goods and services, has been perverted into OINK-onomics, where the few grow rich at the expense of the poor (and more recently, the middle class). We’re not talking the dignity of the American eagle here, but the ignobility of the pig: “Oink! Oink”! Nor

are we saying that wealth is bad: Abraham was wealthy. Nicodemus was wealthy. Lydia was wealthy. Many others were wealthy and the Bible doesn't exclude them. But when systems of injustice are put into place by business, government, and a society that exalt the rich and put down the poor, we're moving into that realm better called "OINK-onomics."

There is no question, the past 40 years has seen the rapid growth of a pig-like economics, better called "OINK-onomics!" Consider all the pork-barrel projects, like "bridges to nowhere," we taxpayers are paying for.

And it isn't just government largesse. Big business has contributed hugely to OINK-onomics. Consider the dramatic growth rate of CEO's pay compared to that of most workers the past 40 years. In 1970 that gap was 41 to 1; in 1998, 225 to 1; more recently 420 to 1. Or how the Dow Industrial Average increases when unemployment rises! An accident? I think not.

Consider the highest tax bracket today compared to the two highest brackets during the halcyon days of the super growth of the middle class in the United States during the 1950's and 60's. Today the top tax bracket is 35% and people are carping. Anyone want to guess what it was in 1964? How about 91% for the top bracket and 71% for the next highest bracket! Yikes! Our own Oracle of Omaha, Warren Buffett is quick to point out his Office Manager pays a higher effective tax rate than he does! It's why Buffett also opposes repeal of the Estate Tax.

Wealth has been “skyrocketing up” to a fortunate few rather than “trickling down” to the proliferating poor over the past 35 years under *both* political parties’ congresses and administrations. According to Edward Wolff in a book called *Top Heavy*, in 1976 the top 1% Americans in the United States owned 19.9% of the nation’s wealth. In 1997 the top 1% Americans owned 40.1%.<sup>2</sup> Today the top 1% own between 41 and 44% of the nation’s wealth. If a chart were designed to show wealth in the U.S., the line for the lowest 97% would look like a slight upwards climb—like the altitude gain between here and Colorado’s front range! After this, for the top 3% the line hits the stratosphere, making Mt. Everest look like a foothill!

Furthermore, the unregulated growth of what Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman calls “America’s shadow banking system” over the past 15 years has only accentuated this problem to the point it nearly put our economy under the table.<sup>3</sup> Additionally frightening is that, whenever the wealthiest 1% of Americans owns more than 36% of our nation’s wealth, the United States always enters a recession or a depression. Little wonder our country is in the fix it’s in. The top 1% now own more than 41% of our nation’s wealth; because we’re practicing OINK-onomics, not economics!

What has this to do with us, the church, this obviously spiritual institution? As I said before, first century Christians didn’t pigeonhole life into religion, politics, and economics. They were all a part of one fabric,

even if their faith took precedence. They and their Jewish ancestors understood that economics was a spiritual issue. They saw how wealth could corrupt people's spiritual values and distance them from God. They saw what it was like for poor farmers to lose their land when their wealthy creditors called in their debts, even in droughts. They saw how the social, political, and economic fabric tore apart as the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. They experienced the destruction of God's faithful household idealized in Acts 4 where "*There was not a needy person among them.*"<sup>4</sup>

People's tendency is to think God watches casually from heaven, indifferent to such injustice. But not so! The prophet Jeremiah indicates those who unjustly amass wealth end up as fools. To wit: Michael Milkin, Leona Helmsley, and Bernie Madhoff. Jesus picks up this same theme in his Parable of the Rich Fool, who, Jerry Jones-like, kept building bigger, more extravagant barns. Remember how the parable ends? "*You fool! This night your soul will be required of you! So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.*"<sup>5</sup>

But God's anger is best vented by the prophet Amos, who tells ancient Israel that God will snub their worship and ignore their prayers for the nation's porcine greed: "*Hear this! You that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land...I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation.*"<sup>6</sup>

So, “Why is Amos in such a bad mood? Because the rich have used their riches to burden those who will never work their way out of debt. Because the clever have used their cleverness to trick those who cannot think as fast. Because making a profit has become more important than anything else in the land—more important than justice, more important than Sabbath, more important than God.”<sup>7</sup> In a word, Amos says the rich have broken their historic covenant with God to treat the poor with compassion, humanity, and justice. The rich have practiced OINK-onomics at the expense of God’s hoped for household of shalom: peace with justice.

Friday, René and I noticed the Lottery was up to \$150 million. As always, we talked of buying a ticket or two. Then René sent me to buy some, except I forgot to go. See, we’re not above OINK-onomics! And probably neither are you, our highest ideals notwithstanding.

Our task as Christians is to find some other way besides building bigger barns, passively deferring to the rich and thus adding our complicity, and practicing OINK-onomics.

You see, this is why we are holding our Day of Action and Service on October 11. Not to assuage our consciences. Not because we believe one day of good works is going to turn our wealthy nation and world around. Not because we’ve learned young adults are more into hands-on mission than institutional religion. BUT because the journey of a thousand miles

begins with the first step! Our Day of Action and Service is our first small step toward rebuilding the *oikos*, the one household God wants the church, our nation, and our world to become.

One young couple sets the example. When Michigan residents Christine Bouwkamp and Kyle Kramer got married in the spring of 2007, they held a wedding reception that was anything but traditional. Instead of hosting a formal dinner, they held a simple reception at their church where guests were invited to help distribute food to people in need.

In the weeks leading up to their wedding, Christine and Kyle had decided they wanted to begin their marriage with an act of service to Christ. With that goal in mind, they figured out how much money they would have spent on a more extravagant reception, and instead used that money to purchase 5,000 lbs. of food for those in need. The week of the wedding, the couple spread the word that a truck with free food would be at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. Immediately after they exchanged their vows Bouwkamp and Kramer put on aprons marked “Bride” and “Groom” and joined their wedding guests in distributing food to 100 neighborhood families.

When asked about the charitable act, the happy couple simply said they wanted to “bless God for blessing us with each other.” They started their household like Acts household: living so no one would be in need.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As found in [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (Dallas Cowboys Stadium) & Tribute to Excess

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Kevin Phillips' *Wealth and Democracy*, NY: Broadway Books, 2002, p. 123

<sup>3</sup> Paul Krugman, *The Return of Depression Economics & the Crisis of 2008*,

<sup>4</sup> Acts 4:34

<sup>5</sup> Luke 12:31

<sup>6</sup> Amos 8:4,9

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, "Famine in the Land," *Home By Another Way*, Boston: Cowley, pp 180-181

<sup>8</sup> Van Morris, Mt. Washington, KY, & Brian Lowery, managing editor, *PreachingToday.com*, Keyword, Acts 2:44-45, source: "Serving Together," Our Daily Bread (June 2008)