

GNITN

How America Dies

How America Collapses – Loss Of Economic Discipline

Lawlessness From The Top

We like to think that lawlessness, as we discussed in our last lesson, is mostly seen in those at the bottom of the food chain, but the worst people and the worst results happen when lawlessness is found at the top of the said food chain. Rome had serious issues with leaders who simply did what they wanted and let others figure out how to support those decisions. Living in excess or living beyond your means is a recipe for disaster for any one and by extension, any nation. If leaders decide they want to be popular with the people, they can always give away things to people for free. And if they want to live lives of luxury, well they can pilfer the money from the national till. While it is said that information is power, in politics, money is power and you can do whatever you like if you spread the wealth to people who make the laws and enforce them as well. Even in Rome they had laws to reign in such power, but rulers often just didn't follow them. In some cases they simply ignored them. No society or nation can long survive when it spends more than it has, even for seemingly good reasons. America is no different.

Robin Hood Would Be Proud

Stealing from the rich to help the poor makes for a good story. And a story that sells a lot of books and makes a lot of movies. Playing the class warfare card makes people powerful and popular and wins elections. Or so we think. Simple financial rules tell you that you can't take from one to pay another forever, especially when the person you pay doesn't work. Robin Hoods can only take money as long as there is money to be taken and it is stealing money anyway you look at it. Dress it up as helping the poor or those less fortunate, but the finances have to come from somewhere. Rome's basic wealth came from land. But when they couldn't expand their borders, mostly by costly wars, they had to do what they became infamous for in Biblical times: tax everyone more. And to stay in power they would collect more from the masses and then give it back to them and make them think the government is generous. But what would emperors do when the senators tried to reign them in? I'll let author *N.S. Gill* [explain](#):

Emperors deliberately overtaxed the senatorial (or ruling) class in order to render it powerless. To do this, the emperors needed a powerful set of enforcers—the imperial guard. Once the wealthy and powerful were no longer either rich or powerful, the poor had to pay the bills of the state. These bills included the payment of the imperial guard and the military troops at the empire's borders.

Nothing Is Really Free

And yet, we still think it is. That new cell phone they tell you is “free” is really being paid by you over time in monthly payments for phone calling and internet access. But when you really do give any goods or service to someone at no cost to them, the goods or service have to come from somewhere. In Rome, they worked out a deal with Egypt to get grain which they then gave to the people for, you guessed it, free. Food subsidies were a staple of Rome, but they still needed the private sector to buy it to actually pay for the food, which was grain, but later was extended to bread and even oil. Emperors also helped pay for this out of their own pockets and as word spread of the freebies, immigrants poured into Rome to get their share. Eventually, leaders had to limit the amount of these supplies and those who came in to get their share of the cookie jar found themselves squeezed out and took to mob behavior to survive. And we're back to lawlessness. Here is how John Stossel [explains](#) Rome's expanding welfare state:

It started with “subsidized grain. The government gave it away at half price. But the problem was that they couldn’t stop there ... a man named Claudius ran for Tribune on a platform of free wheat for the masses. And won. It was downhill from there.”

Soon, to appease angry voters, emperors gave away or subsidized olive oil, salt and pork. People lined up to get free stuff.

Rome’s government, much like ours, wasn’t good at making sure subsidies flowed only to the poor, said Reed: “Anybody could line up to get these goods, which contributed to the ultimate bankruptcy of the Roman state.”

Paying For It

Rome would eventually have to take drastic steps to remain financially solvent. Going back to Stossel we see how:

As inflation increased, Rome, much like the U.S. under President Nixon, imposed wage and price controls. When people objected, Emperor Diocletian denounced their “greed,” saying, “Shared humanity urges us to set a limit.”

Doesn’t that sound like today’s anti-capitalist politicians?

Diocletian was worse than Nixon. Rome enforced controls with the death penalty — and forbid people to change professions. Emperor Constantine decreed that those who broke such rules “be bound with chains and reduced to servile condition.”

Eventually, Rome’s empire was so large — and people so resentful of centralized control — that generals in outlying regions began declaring independence from Rome.

In the Stossel we’re told this:

Nero reduced the silver content of coins to 95 percent. Then Trajan reduced it to 85 percent and so on. By the year 300, wheat that once cost eight Roman dollars cost 120,000 Roman dollars.

Are we any better? When we need more money, we just print it with nothing to back it up with. Can you say inflation?

Paying For Wars

As I previously mentioned, Rome needed to expand to get more land which they would work to bring in more funds. The military would then provide workers from the peoples they conquered. Slave labor was a necessary element of this process. Here is how this caused financial instability over time from an [article](#) from *history.com*:

Even as Rome was under attack from outside forces, it was also crumbling from within thanks to a severe financial crisis. Constant wars and overspending had significantly lightened imperial coffers, and oppressive taxation and inflation had widened the gap between rich and poor. In the hope of avoiding the taxman, many members of the wealthy classes had even fled to the countryside and set up independent fiefdoms.

At the same time, the empire was rocked by a labor deficit. Rome’s economy depended on slaves to till its fields and work as craftsmen, and its military might had traditionally provided a fresh influx of conquered peoples to put to work. But when expansion ground to a halt in the second century, Rome’s supply of slaves and other war treasures began to dry up. A further blow came in the fifth century, when the vandals claimed North Africa and began disrupting the empire’s trade by prowling the mediterranean as pirates. With its economy faltering and its commercial and agricultural production in decline, the empire began to lose its grip on Europe.

Can we actually think we can fund multiple wars like Rome thought they could do? In an [interview](#) Joe Biden told the interviewer this:

“We’re the United States of America for God’s sake. The most powerful nation in the history of the world.”

“We can take care of both of these and still maintain our overall international defense. We have the capacity to do this and we have an obligation to, we are the “essential nation” to paraphrase the former secretary of state. And if (we) don’t then who does?”

Unhealthy Excesses

Going back to the Stossel article we read this concerning unscrupulous spending:

The Romans were worse. I object to President Obama’s \$100 million dollar trip, but Nero traveled with 1,000 carriages.

Tiberius established an “office of imperial pleasures,” which gathered “beautiful boys and girls from all corners of the world” so, as Tacitus put it, the emperor “could defile them.”

Emperor Commodus held a show in the Colosseum at which he personally killed five hippos, two elephants, a rhinoceros, and a giraffe.

While we may not have an emperor who spends lavishly on his own wants, we do have government officials who fully take advantage of the money at their disposal. Senator Rand Paul publishes what he calls a “Festivus Report” to air his grievances about the government. Among them are these examples of government waste in 2022 as detailed in an [article](#) on *fee.org*:

Using Covid Relief Funds To Construct An 800-Room Luxury Hotel

Broward County, Florida spent \$140 million in COVID-19 relief funds to construct a luxury hotel, complete with 30,000 square feet of pool decks, a rooftop bar, and an 11,000-square-foot spa and fitness center. Surely that’s not allowed—you might be thinking—and you’d be right. But the county found a clever work-around. In a board meeting this past February, the money was transferred to the county’s general fund and described as a federal payment to cover lost tax revenue. The money was then returned from the general fund back to the project.

Camouflage Uniforms That Don’t Blend In

The federal government spent \$28 million on camouflage uniforms for use in Afghanistan which...didn’t match the environment of Afghanistan.

Maintaining 77,000 Empty Federal Buildings

According to the Office of Management and Budget, the federal government spends more than \$1.7 billion a year to maintain 77,000 empty buildings. Part of the problem is that the process for selling these buildings is quite long due to the various regulations involved.

Injecting 6-Month-Old Beagle Puppies With Cocaine

According to a report from White Coat Waste, the NIH recently spent \$2.3 million injecting puppies with cocaine for research.

Researching If Thanos Could Snap His Fingers Wearing The Infinity Gauntlet

Researchers at Georgia Tech recently got a grant for \$118,971 to study whether a real-life Thanos could actually snap his fingers while wearing the Infinity Gauntlet. They concluded that “Thanos could not have snapped because of his metal armored fingers. So, it’s probably the Hollywood special effects, rather than actual physics, at play.”

And that folks, is your tax dollars at work.

Don't We Have Laws Against This?

What good are laws if you don't enforce or follow them? Going back to *Stossel* we read this: *The Roman Republic had a constitution, but Roman leaders often ignored it. "Marius was elected consul six years in a row, even though under the constitution (he) was term-limited to one year.*

"We have presidents of both parties legislating by executive order, saying I'm not going to enforce certain laws because I don't like them. ... That open flouting of the law is dangerous because law ceases to have meaning. ... I see that today. ... Congress passes huge laws they haven't even read (as well as) overspending, overtaxing and devaluing the currency."

As I said at the start, lawlessness and lack of economic discipline are two sides of the same coin at times. With Rome, you could ignore the laws if you controlled who enforced them. The imperial guard could easily use their muscle to make anyone bow the knee to leadership, as long as they got paid, which again, put financial pressure on the system.

Some Good Was Done, But...

Rome did do some good things when they were flush with money as seen in this quote from an [article](#) titled *How Excessive Government Killed Rome* by Bruce Bartlett:

During the early Empire revenues were so abundant that the state was able to undertake a massive public works program. Augustus repaired all the roads of Italy and Rome, restored the temples and built many new ones, and built many aqueducts, baths and other public buildings. However, when funds dried up, taxing the rich was a popular tactic as well, but the consequences are seen in another quote from Bartlett:

As the private wealth of the Empire was gradually confiscated or taxed away, driven away or hidden, economic growth slowed to a virtual standstill. Moreover, once the wealthy were no longer able to pay the state's bills, the burden inexorably fell onto the lower classes, so that average people suffered as well from the deteriorating economic conditions. In Rostovtzeff's words, "The heavier the pressure of the state on the upper classes, the more intolerable became the condition of the lower."

Man, That's Depressing

Yes it is. Especially if you feel that you can't do anything to stop it. But for the Christian, hope is not based in this world, but in the next. We need to remember that Christianity started when Rome ruled and eventually helped topple that great empire. My point is not that we start a revolution, although Americans are pretty good at doing that. What I'm saying is that God is the source for our needs and we must follow this formula to stop our worrying:

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ([Matt 6:33, NKJV](#))

Of course the context are the previous verses where Jesus tells them how God feeds the birds and clothes, the lilies of the field, the food and clothes which are the "things" we worry so much about. He even chides His disciples by calling them "you of little faith." When the financial world falls apart, God's world stands firm. Rome fell, America is on the same path, but we are building on the solid rock that can and will stand in the worst of storms. Start or continue seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and let Him do the rest.