Universe 25

On September 3rd, 1929, the U.S. stock market's Dow Jones Industrial Average reached a height of 381.17. That seems comically low compared to today's value, somewhere around 50,000. This measuring tool is widely recognized as a benchmark for the health of the U.S. stock market and the broader economy. This was a fairly healthy number for back then. But investors were buying stock with as little as 10% down, using borrowed money. This was creating an unsustainable financial bubble.

By October 24th of that year, a record number of shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange as panic-selling started. The next Monday, October 28th, the market plummeted another 13%. On Tuesday, October 29th, a new record of stock selling was registered. This became known as Black Tuesday, as the economy of the U.S. collapsed. The U.S., along with the rest of the world, entered the Great Depression.

The DOW eventually bottomed out on July 8, 1932, at the value of 41.22 – an 89% loss from its 1929 peak. It actually took until November of 1954 for the market to fully recover. It took 25 years.

Herbert Hoover, a Republican, had been the president during the start of Great Depression. I don't think his chances were very good to be re-elected while in the 1932 presidential race. And indeed, Democrat Franklin Roosevelt won in a landslide.

In order to combat the crippling effects of the Great Depression, Roosevelt's administration created a series of domestic economic programs, financial reforms, and public works projects. This was known as the New Deal. The core goals were to provide immediate assistance for the millions of unemployed, poor, and starving citizens. Its intent was also to restart consumer demand, agricultural production, and business activity. And it implemented changes in the banking, financial, and labor systems to prevent future economic collapse.

Under the New Deal, the Housing Act of 1937 was passed. Housing conditions in urban areas were often deplorable. Cities were growing, immigrants were pouring in from Europe and Asia, seeking work and a better life. It was not just Americans who were challenged during the Great Depression. This was a worldwide trial. Dense populations led to overcrowded, unsanitary, and unsafe living conditions. The Housing Act was to provide affordable housing for low-income families, and address problems of inner-city environments.

In the decades since, subsidized or government-assisted housing has been met with varying degrees of success and failure. Today, about 5 million households in the U.S. receive some form of housing voucher, or live in fully subsidized homes. And this was the environment where a gentleman named Ed Latimore grew up.

In a YouTube video, Ed Latimore detailed his upbringing. Ed noted that in his neighborhood, pizza delivery cars always came with two occupants – a driver and a passenger. And the reason for this was not because people who lived near him ordered dozens of pizzas at a time. The community wasn't hankering for wheelbarrows full of pizza each evening. One employee had the responsibility to carry the pizza from the delivery car to the customer's front door. The other carried a gun. Ed grew up in the projects. We'll come back to Ed in a moment.

I want to introduce you to the term *ethology*. I shouldn't perhaps assume you aren't familiar with this word, but I wasn't, and I tend to think most people are like me. Ethology is a branch of zoology that studies the behavior of non-human animals. When some geese or ducks hatch from eggs, the youngsters tend to attach themselves to the first moving object they see. Normally this would be the mother, but it could be another animal – even a human – who happens to be in the proximity of the hatchlings. We've probably all seen cute videos of little ducks following some amused person around. This behavior has been studied, and the ones performing these studies are ethologists.

John Calhoun was our seventh President. But a different John Calhoun received a PH.D. in zoology and biology. This Calhoun was an American ethologist, and in the 1940s he began to study rats. Pest control measures had failed in the rat populations within large cities, and he wanted to learn more about their behavior. The more that people are crowded together, the more garbage and sewage are produced, and the larger the rat community will therefore be. Calhoun's effort was to limit – or even eradicate – the rat population.

Calhoun built several living environments for various experiments, and noticed that the rats preferred to cluster together, rather than make use of the abundant space provided to them. So there's one characteristic that seems common between rats and humans, as cities are continually growing. Other observations were noted. By the 1960s, Calhoun shifted his focus from rats to mice, and built a series of 24 enclosed rodent universes inside the National Institute of Mental Health laboratories in Maryland.

In his 24 experiments, Calhoun designed some nice accommodations for mice. Plenty of food, water, bedding, protection from predators and diseases, and large living spaces. In all 24 examples, a grim trajectory unfolded: an initial boom in population would give way to social disruption, spikes in violence, distorted mating habits, and eventually collapse. Every mouse died.

Then in 1968, Calhoun created Universe 25. And that's the title of this message: *Universe 25*. This would be the ultimate, definite test. The structure had 256 individual nesting boxes – or apartments – capable of holding up to 4,000 mice. He selected four pairs of disease-free mice, and introduced them into this habitat. He set the stage for what should be a mice utopia. All the food and water the mice wanted were supplied. The perfect temperature for flourishing was maintained. No predators could reach the mice. All the room and bedding material the mice could wish for was provided. Every problem that could potentially arise was mitigated. These four pairs of mice had won the lottery.

Calhoun began his observations. He wanted to study what would happen to the mice when nothing was hard for them. No hunting for food, no need to hide from predators – all survival challenges were removed. Every need was met.

Initially, the mice explored their new habitat. It took a bit for the mice to acclimate to their surroundings, but eventually the mice paired off. The first litter was born on day 104. The population began to double relatively quickly compared to the beginning of the experiment. On day 560, the population reached its peak at 2,200 mice. Though the habitat was designed to accommodate twice that many mice, the decline began. Calhoun was puzzled. On day 920, no new mice were born. The prior day was the last litter. The last mouse died four years and ten months after Universe 25 began.

What killed this mice colony? It was, after all, the perfect environment created for flourishing. Food, water, climate, protection – everything was provided. Did an unforeseen virus seep into the community? Did Dr. Calhoun's pet cats breach the enclosure?

What happened in Universe 25? Does it teach us anything, or are the results to be dismissed? We humans are animals in a biological sense, and we share many characteristics – social aspects, communication methods, survival drives, and even empathy and attachment. It is well documented that species like dogs and elephants display deep emotional attachment, and a host of other animals demonstrate joy, sadness, playfulness, pain, and grief.

If we consider only biology and anthropology, science identifies that our DNA matches chimpanzees to the degree of 98.8%. But we even match with chickens to 75%. Evolutionists would point out that we all share the same ancestry, and it was just chance and circumstance that provided the path for the uniqueness that we humans have - compared to the squirrel or baboon. From this perspective, studies in ethology should have a direct correlation with human beings. In other words, we should be concerned with the results of Universe 25.

But those of us who believe in creation know that God set apart mankind. We are made in God's image, distinct from the rest of the animals. We know God designed us to have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth and over every living thing that moves on the earth. We find this in the first chapter of Genesis. Because of our distinction from all other animals, we don't really need to be concerned with experiments or results from the study of the lesser life forms that God created. Or should we be concerned?

Job 12:7-8 – ***But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you.***

Job here is responding to his friend, Zophar. Job's friends were concluding that Job's trials were deserved, and Job had a difficult time accepting that explanation. The poetic nature and style of this discourse throughout the book is quite substantial. But a takeaway from this passage is that we can learn from what God placed on this earth with us.

Ecclesiastes 3:18-19 – ***I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals." For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity."***

There is a heading in my Bible that precedes this passage, which reads, "Injustice Seems to Prevail." Solomon is lamenting the wickedness of man. I'm sure Solomon had witnessed horrible acts of violence and depravity, as we all have. He likens the behavior of men to the behavior of animals – unthinking, uncaring. Because Solomon is focused on the vanity of man, he's referring to the unrighteous. They are no different from animals. He states that what happens to men also happens to animals.

We can take this to mean that without God's spirit, what happens to animals also happens to men. Should we care about the results of Universe 25? Yes, we should. The future of man, without God's spirit, is predicted in Universe 25.

So what happened to the mice in Universe 25? Everything was provided – food, water, protection – everything. But getting every need met is not the same as living happily ever after. The stronger males began to dominate the food and water sources. The weaker ones found no role in this society, and just wandered around. Calhoun referred to these mice as dropouts. They became easy targets, which were picked on by dominant males for no obvious reason. Violence for mice within the wild is necessary, and has a purpose: defending territory, food, or mates, for example. But violence in Universe 25 appeared random and indiscriminate.

In healthy societies, fathers would defend their young. But fathers in Universe 25 began to abandon their offspring. Mothers then assumed this role, in addition to the role of nursing. Mothers became more aggressive, and would turn on their offspring. It was observed that mothers would seem to forget which pups belonged to them. In some cases, mothers began eating their own young. The pups that did survive grew up not knowing what a mom and dad were supposed to do.

There was an observable lack of social order. Young mice learn how to compete, court mates, and establish territory from older mice. In mice society, it's not just parents, but all older mice become teachers and guides. This disappeared in Universe 25.

Calhoun also noticed a certain segment of the mice population, which he called "the beautiful ones." Their fur was immaculate because they spent so much time grooming themselves. They rarely fought or explored, and were not interested in mating. They just ate, slept, and groomed, avoiding the rest of the colony.

Each generation of mice learned from the bad behavior and characteristics of the previous generation. Young mice never learned how to establish themselves socially. They reacted violently to any minor incident. Some mice just ate, slept, and groomed themselves. They didn't mate, and were just focused on themselves. They were socially dead. One by one, the mice – who were not killed by aggression – simply died of old age.

Dr. Calhoun noted that the mice in Universe 25 died twice. The first was the death of the spirit, and the second was the death of the body. The first happened years before the second. The death of the spirit was the result of the social disorder, passed along to each generation, in the form of apathy or violence.

Now, humans are not the same as mice. We can simply look at Universe 25, and conclude that this experiment did not turn out very well for mice. I have about four mouse traps I set in my garage, as somehow mice sneak in, and I want to prevent them from nesting and doing whatever damage mice can do to my garage stuff. That's about the only interaction I have with mice in my life.

And along with that, I don't have any experience living in the inner-city projects. But Ed Latimore does. And he pointed out in his video some striking similarities between Universe 25, and his childhood experiences in the hood. Ed noted that the conditions, the patterns, and the outcome mimicked his neighborhood. When he learned about Universe 25, Ed remarked that he's seen this story before – in his own life.

The projects started with clean, modern housing, back in the 1930s. The idea wasn't designed to house poor people. It was to provide a stable place to live while people got back on their feet. Most early residents had jobs. It wasn't meant to be a permanent destination. But then things changed.

After WWII, people started moving to the suburbs. Government-backed home loans incentivized single family homes. A new interstate highway system was developed, which stretched America from communities to subdivisions and beyond. Cities started losing factory jobs to more rural or overseas productions. The projects became not a mix of the population, but included only those who were struggling. The 1960s and 1970s came with social, economic, and policy changes that reshaped environments. Free love, the birth control pill – these attacked family structures. And drugs pour gasoline on an already fiery social problem.

When Moses was 80, and Aaron was 83, God sent them to speak to Pharoah. This was immediately before the plagues in Egypt began. God wanted to perform a miracle in front of Pharoah, and He had Aaron throw down his rod. It became a serpent.

Exodus 7:11 – ***But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.***

The magicians of Egypt replicated this miracle.

2 Timothy 3:8 – ***Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.***

Jewish tradition asserts that Jannes and Jambres were these sorcerers of Egypt who served under Pharoah. They were an extension of Egypt – of sin - of Satan. And we should take note that it's not only God or Jesus who can perform miracles. We see this in Revelation chapter 13, where the beast makes fire come down from heaven in the sight of men.

I take note of the detail provided to us here, where we're told that "they will progress no further." Well, who is "they"? It is men and women who resist the truth, who are corrupt. In other words, they are those who reject God, and reject the principles that we can find throughout the Bible. On day 560 of Universe 25, the colony progressed no further.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 – ***But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!***

This is prophecy of end times, or as the Bible states here, "in the last days." Now I don't think it's God intent that we associate these characteristics of people who will progress no further, with the mice in Universe 25. That's admittedly a stretch. Most of these attributes don't even apply to animals. But as we read in Ecclesiastes, what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals. Solomon's point is that animals will die, and so will the sons of men. But there is a path to that end point.

Many of the mice in Universe 25 were brutal, and headstrong. They were violent, for no particular reason. And many were simply lovers of themselves – they just ate, slept, and groomed. They looked pristine – Calhoun referred to them as "the beautiful ones."

But how much more applicable is this list of end time qualities to those who live the thug life? How has the environment of the projects shaped those who reject God? Again, I didn't have this experience. But Ed Latimore did. He detailed his life in his video.

What do we see here in this list: lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, haughty and proud. Inner-city culture has spread through all of society. In the late 2010s, rap music official surpassed rock as the biggest music genre in the U.S., dominating digital audio and video streams. What is the content of this music? Money, boasting, pride, conquest, and self-identifying glory. I haven't heard a rap song comment on the beauty of mist over a country meadow. And you haven't either.

What about disobedience to parents? Well, fathers are absent in the hood. Women can do incredible things, but I like how the comedian Chris Rock put it when it comes to mothers raising children alone: you can drive a car with your feet if you have to, but it doesn't mean it's a good idea. Sometimes our life circumstances don't provide us a choice when it comes to single parent households. We all understand that. But this condition is dominate in the projects.

How about slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good. There's a bevy of statistics that show those in government housing and subsidized homes have a much higher rate of drug usage than average. Prostitution rates are higher, violence is higher, crime is higher. Children who are exposed to life without good role models will not tend to gravitate towards the good. And the cycle perpetuates, just like in Universe 25.

Video has recently been released of that six-year-old child in Virginia who shot his teacher. This child cursed at and threatened the police, as revealed in the body-cam footage. If you've seen this video, you were likely, utterly shocked that this could be the behavior of a child. Did that child have good parents?

The hood isn't unique because the people are different, and they have different goals. It is unique because the environment changed first, and then the social breakdown followed. Traditional paths are not followed anymore. People are getting married less often, fathers abandon their young, and good role models are disappearing from communities. Church attendance falls, communities no longer unite for meaningful purposes. One's status changes from long-term achievements – like family, and career - to immediate visibility. Looking successful became more important than being successful.

When people feel like they can't win the long game, or no longer have that as a goal, they will focus on the short game. This is what Calhoun observed in Universe 25. Universe 25 isn't a story about mice making bad decisions. It was a story of adapting to an abnormal environment. And we are watching the same thing happen now in America as a whole. And as people have adapted to the changing

environment of America, the culture rewards those who are adapting to it. This is why the hood matters. This is why Universe 25 matters. It's the early warning system of end times.

It is striking how similar the setting of Universe 25 was to how governments want to address problems they see in societies – in particular, the inner-city communities. We all need food and shelter, and this was provided in Universe 25. This is provided by government as well in projects. And the outcomes are eerily similar. Our environments have a big impact on our behavior.

We can read in Genesis 2:15 that God commanded Adam to tend and keep the garden. Then when Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, God makes a few statements: "In toil you shall eat of it", "by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread," and that men would now have to "till the ground." Then the Sabbath commandment tells us that, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." And we can finish this thought with 2 Thessalonians 3:10, where God tells us, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

Universe 25 dismissed the idea that God shares with us, where effort is necessary for sustainability. Respect to the results of Universe 25 and a work ethic, I don't find this terribly profound, because mice are not men. But the projects that Ed Latimore experienced dismissed the idea that effort is necessary for sustainability. And that is worth noting.

In 2002, Jack Whittaker from West Virginia won the largest Powerball lottery at that time. He took the cash option, and netted $113 million after taxes. He bragged about always carrying large amounts of cash with him, and subsequently, was robbed repeatedly. He bought his granddaughter Brandi several vehicles, and gave her $2,000 a week. That attracted some bad characters, and she was eventually found dead from a drug overdose. His wife filed for divorce six years after winning the lottery. Mr. Whittaker stated, "I pretty much lost everything I had and held dear in life."

In 1997, Billie Bob Harrell won $31 million in the Texas lottery. He thought he had it all. Two years later, unable to take the pressure of constantly lending money to family and friends, and lamenting the strained relationships, he ended his own life.

We can find many more examples of lottery winners that had their lives destroyed.

Proverbs 13:11 (ESV) – ***Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.***

The biblical directive we have is to not play the lottery. And this substantiates Genesis, Exodus, and Thessalonians: we are to labor, we are to work. When effort is no longer necessary for sustainability, the tendency is that collapse will follow. Universe 25 revealed this. The projects reveal this. And this is seeping into America, and the world as a whole.

This is not a message about experiments and outcomes. This is not a message about effective government policies, versus ineffective ones. This is a message about prophecy.

Ezekiel 3:17 – ***"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from me."***

God gave Ezekiel the role of a watchman. Ezekiel was to warn the wicked. He didn't have control of their response, or any subsequent change in their behavior. The warning was his responsibility. And we can read in verse 19 that regardless of the impact, by issuing the warning, Ezekiel would save his soul.

Matthew 24:42-44 – ***Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.***

You and I, like Ezekiel, are called to be watchmen. And like Ezekiel, Jonah also received this commission. Will America be like Ninevah? Will America ask the question, "Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" It's the question Ninevah asked, in Jonah 3:9, after they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth. It doesn't seem likely to me that American will go down this path of repentance. But that is not my responsibility, and it's not yours. We have the commission to watch, and be ready.

So, let's watch.

Universe 25 demonstrates that when mice have all needs met – at least all physical needs – without requiring effort – this environment changes behavior. And the society collapses. Every mouse died - some from apathy, but most from violence. This described the time of Noah, where violence filled the earth. And we can read earlier in Matthew chapter 24 where this will also define the times of the end of this age.

The housing projects of the 1930s evolved from initially being a stepping-stone with stopgap measures of admirable intentions, to an enabling umbrella of dependency. Physical needs are met, without requiring effort. And violence is an active and prominent component in these societies. In both cases – Universe 25, and the projects - the roles of parents, grandparents, teachers, and leaders were removed. And the society collapses.

What do we watch for? Well, the scope is staggering. Revelation describes governments that will align themselves under the direction of a single entity. The world will be united, and affirm a single religion. It will capture the vast majority of people, who will marvel at the sight of the miracle of fire coming down from heaven. So let's be mindful of the coming unity of governments, and the unity of religions.

But to emphasize what I've covered in this message, let's watch for governments and societies that wish to provide for their people the necessities of food and shelter. This won't be limited to the dense populations of the inner-city, but will be widespread. These necessities of our mortal lives now are to come with effort, if we believe and follow the Bible. Everything free comes with a cost. And that cost will be the loss of roles in society, and then purpose. And what follows will be violence, and collapse.

This isn't to say that there are none among us who need help. I doubt that no one here has never needed assistance – whether it be a place to stay, food to eat, a financial blessing in a needy time. I'm

seeing stats that vary between 200 and 2000 times where the Bible instructs us or emphasizes the idea of helping the poor or needy.

The problem arises when those who can do for themselves, choose not to. If effort is no longer required for sustainability, then people will choose the path of no effort. They will choose the non-biblical path.

My brothers and I were coming out of Menards in Brooklyn Park, after picking up supplies for my older brother's deck project. A young man raced up to us on his bicycle, and asked us for money. I pointed to the help wanted sign on the side of the building, and he simply biked away. We are all aware of the rampant fraud in government programs in Minnesota. We are all surrounded by people who wish to gain wealth hastily, as opposed to gathering little by little – referencing what we read earlier in Proverbs 13:11.

And that gathering – little by little – comes with effort. If we remove the effort, we change the social environment. In doing so, we change the roles in society. And when the roles in society change, society changes at a fundamental level. And collapse will be the result.

There are loud voices today that advocate for the worker. Corporations are evil and wicked in general, and workers are angelic victims. Socialism, Communism, and Marxism are all different flavors of the same taste. They don't want people to be in charge. They want governments to be in charge. And these forms of rule - these distinctions without differences - are supported by various anti-work or post-work movements. The promise is that governments will provide for the people. And these loud voices are becoming elected officials.

So, let's be watchful.

Deuteronomy 28:52-53 - ***They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters who the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you.***

What's described here? Cannibalism. This chapter is about disobedience, and doesn't appear to directly imply prophecy. But end times will be the worst of times – and will include the worst behavior of mankind. Is what we read here literal, or simply an intense metaphor of difficult times? I don't know. But I believe times like this are not an insight to what next week will bring to our country. It seems like we are far away from such grueling events. Yet, as Universe 25 collapsed, the mice were eating their young.

But we can see now that our environment is changing. Universe 25 did not collapse immediately. It was a slow process, with each subsequent generation losing societal roles, and leaving future generations without family and community models. Apathy and violence were the result.

The housing projects of the 1930s also slowly changed the environment for its residents. Role models disappeared, and children grew up without family and community models. Apathy and violence were the result.

And both Universe 25 and the projects were predicated on the idea that food and shelter were provided without effort from the recipient. It sure seems like it'd be a good idea. The problem is that it's not a biblical idea. And the results are described for us throughout the Bible. We call these results end times. Prophecy is being fulfilled.

So let's watch for government promising to provide for its people, without effort or responsibilities. This includes elements like universal basic income. Governments, or the rich, should pay for the needs of the poor, right? The problem is that Robin Hood – who steals from the rich to give to the poor - is a literary character. He's not a biblical one. And as we watch, and see these ideals of society implemented, and see the collapse of America – and the world as a whole – let us be ever more diligent to stay close to God.

Biblical prophecy is not only about God showing us that He was right from the beginning. He was, and is, of course, right about everything. But because God is right about everything, we can be assured that His promises will also be fulfilled. These are glorious and eternal, everlasting promises. And these promises for those who walk in His statutes, and follow Jesus, our future king, will also be fulfilled.

Until that time of Christ's return, let's watch.