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#1337

Urban Legends
Following God Brings Good Luck

Have you ever been in a relationship with someone who is very needy? It can start off with you thinking I'm really helping this person out, but if it's a one way street after a while you begin to feel drained.

Successful relationships on any level are always ultimately two way. Relationships tend to die when the only time one person is involved is when they need something from the other person.

Imagine having a friend who in hard times come to you in need and want, but during good times forgets that you even exist. Imagine having a friend who seems so satisfied and fulfilled and hangs out with the ones they consider cooler friends. You feel like you're wearing a sign that reads, "Use Me!"

Who is God to you this morning? If you say, "I'm not really sure. A friend invited me to come today," or "I just saw the church and stopped in, but I'm not sure what I believe about God," then hopefully what's happening here in this service will help you on your spiritual journey.

But many here this morning would say, God is not only my Creator and my Savior, but He's my friend. I have a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. What's that relationship really like? I mean, think about some of the songs we sang this morning. Are they a reality in your life?

*You're all I want
You're all I've ever needed*

How about:
*Jesus draw me close
Closer Lord to You
For I desire to worship and obey*

Those are pretty intense words, aren't they? How real are they in your life? Do you only go to God when you need something?

We're in week two of a series we're calling Urban Legends. There's a lot of urban legends floating around. You probably get them in your inbox regularly.

They range from stories of women being abducted from parking lots by men getting them to smell perfume, which is really ether, to Nancy Pelosi's supposed proposal for a 100% tax on stock profits.

Apparently some people have too much time on their hands and keep thinking up new ones.

By the way, before you forward something to all your friends you can go to a site like snopes.com and find out if it's even true. But what about those spiritual urban legends that are floating around? Where do you go to check those out?

Where do you evaluate the accuracy of spiritual opinions that float around as freely as urban legends, but are believed by way too many people.

Fortunately we have a source of authority to go to. That source of authority is the Bible. It's a book that claims to be the Word of God and is filled with just what we'd expect if it actually did come from God.

We'd expect it to be different from other books, and it is. There's a number of unique characteristics that set the Bible apart, one of them being clear, specific, fulfilled prophecy.

There are literally hundreds of predictions that form a pre-written history of Israel, of the nations of the world, and ultimately of Jesus Christ. These are specific prophecies that have been fulfilled. They can be verified.

If you doubt the accuracy of the Bible I'd challenge you to check out the evidence. And while your doing that check out any other religious book from the Holy Koran to the Hindu Verdas and find me one other that has clear verifiable prophecy like the Bible.

The Bible is the accurate, unfailing, authentic source of truth.

So that's where we're going in this series to dispel these spiritual myths. We're going to use the book that claims to be God's word and backs up those claims.

Last week we dispelled the myth that says, "If you just have enough faith life will be great. Everything will work out just like you want it to."

This week we want to look at another urban legend,

I. The Myth: Following God Will Bring Good Luck

Webster's dictionary defines luck as the "force that brings good or bad." The ancient Greeks and Romans used to worship luck in the form of the goddess Fortuna. Her name even became another word for luck, "fortune."

Fortuna had a wheel she'd spin that would determine people's lot in life. That's where the expression "wheel of fortune" comes from.

Luck views good or bad fortune as a tangible thing unto itself. So certain items, like rabbits' feet and four-leaf clovers are said to "bring luck." I think the rabbit would take issue with that!

Before the Nazis hijacked it the swastika was a good luck sign. Here's a post card from 1907. The swastika was made up of 4 Ls which stood for life, light, love, and luck.

Certain days, and even people, are considered "lucky." Seeking "luck" is closely connected with superstition, which in turn is closely connected to magic. It all blends together after a while.

If you live believing in luck, you believe people are at the mercy of unseen powerful and uncertain forces that may help or hurt us and so you look for ways, like carrying a rabbits feet, to try to influence luck.

So what's this have to do with God?

Have you ever felt this way? "Things are going wrong in my life and that's because God is punishing me for things I'm doing wrong?" it's so ingrained in our humanity it's almost impossible not to feel that way.

So what do we begin to formulate in our mind? We often try to come up with a way to influence God and change our bad circumstances.

I'd like you to turn to the Old Testament book of I Samuel with me to see how easy it is to baptize the concept of luck with a spiritual disguise.

Turn to I Samuel 4 Page 246

What we're going to read takes place right around 1100 BC. The Jewish people have been in the land of Israel for about 300 years. During that time they've had to fight a

number of enemies.

One of the big burs in their saddle was the people from Philistia known as the Philistines. The Philistines lived along the coast of Canaan.

Read vs. 1-4

The ark of the covenant was a central object in Israel's worship. The Jews constructed it according God's explicit directions. The word "ark" comes from a Latin term meaning "chest" or "box."

It was a box that contained Aaron, the brother of Moses', rod that budded, manna, which was bread God miraculously provided when they were in the desert, and the stone tablets with the 10 commandments written on them.

The box had a gold lid called the mercy seat and it was there that the high priest of Israel would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The ark represented the presence of God to the Jews. At times God told them to carry it before them in battle so they began to think of it as a good luck charm.

They lost this time so they said, "Hey, lets get the ark and then we'll beat these guys.

Read 5-8

They get the ark, the Philistines find out and they were afraid. They knew that the God if the Hebrews had wiped out Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. They were afraid but that didn't stop them from attacking again.

Read 9-11

What happened?

What happened was the Jewish people had bought into a spiritual urban legend. They thought you could use God for good luck.

Here's the steps to disappointment:

1. Admit that you finally need God's help. That's after you've been too busy with other things to make God much of a priority.
2. Grab onto some spiritual method to try to get God to help. Start going to church, reading your Bible, whatever.

3. Have faith that God's going to come through for you. After all look at how many people He came through for in the Bible.
4. Get depressed, discouraged, and frustrated because God didn't come through for you.

I. The Myth: Following God Will Bring Good Luck

II. The Biblical Reality: You Can't Use God. Let Him Use You

Turn to Deuteronomy 10 Page 169

The New Testament tells us that all these things in the Old Testament are written for our instruction.

It's been said that men couldn't have written the Bible if they wanted to. That's because of the fulfilled prophecy and a number of other factors that show that God had to be the one behind it.

But it's also said that men wouldn't have written the Bible if they could have. Even if they could have, Jewish prophets wouldn't have written the record of Israel's history that they did. The Bible gives you the whole story, warts and all.

It tells about great successes but it details the nation's failure and it's national hero's failures. I mean big time!

Why do we care about what happened to people over 3000 years ago? The author John Luther said, "Learn from the mistakes of others-you can never live long enough to make them all yourself."

Why should we care about people who lived 30 centuries ago. We can learn the wisdom of trusting God but we can also learn the foolishness of thinking that God's there for us to use.

One of the big problems the Jewish people had was misunderstanding the reason for things.

Deuteronomy is a reminder to the next generation about the Laws of God. The first generation out of Egypt got the laws but they doubted God so much He let them die in the desert without going into the homeland He'd promised them.

They've all died off and now it's time for their children to go in. In Deuteronomy Moses is reviewing the different aspects of God's law. One of the big mistakes the Israelites

repeatedly made was thinking God's law was like a good luck charm.

They thought since they had it and other nations didn't, that meant God liked them and nobody else. They thought that if a person kept God's laws that would make them good enough to go to heaven.

They trusted their works instead of trusting God as Savior.

They took the beauty of God's law and made it something it was never intended to be. So listen to how Moses clears the air right from the get-go. **Read vs 12-13**

Sure God wants obedience. But He wants obedience out of a heart of love. Even though the cross was still almost 1500 years away God wanted a relationship with His people.

He was holy, He was to be feared, He was to be obeyed, but not like some pagan god who was bought off by his worshippers. God wanted His people to serve Him out of a heart of love.

God is a personal God. Old testament, New testament, the concepts are the same. God wants to be known, loved, and worshipped by His people.

God isn't someone to be used. He's the Lord and Master who uses us as we submit our lives to Him.

Unfortunately, the history of Israel is littered with instances where the Jewish people thought that what's on the outside was most important. They were the circumcised ones so God was on their side.

They had God's law so they were under His protection.

When God raised up the prophet Jeremiah in the 6th century BC to be His mouth piece and to warn the nation that they would be judged if they didn't turn their hearts back to Him the people laughed.

Jeremiah was threatened in his hometown of Anathoth, he was tried for his life by the priests and prophets of Jerusalem, put in stocks, forced to flee king Jehoiakim, publicly humiliated by the false prophet Hananiah, and was thrown into a cistern.

In Jeremiah 38: 3-6 Jeremiah says, *"Thus says the LORD: 'This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.'" Therefore the princes said to*

the king, "Please, let this man be put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm."

"So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire."

Jeremiah kept preaching truth for 45 years. He was beaten and put in prison, and still he wept over his people. He loved his nation. For Jeremiah it was more painful to see his fellow Jews going on in their stubbornness than it was to go through all the stuff they threw at him.

In the end God brought Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon down on Judah and leveled the place.

Why wouldn't anyone listen? Because they figured they were God's chosen people and God wouldn't let them be defeated. God certainly wouldn't let His temple, His place of worship, be desecrated by some pagan army.

God surely wouldn't let all the other nations laugh at Him because they thought He was so weak He couldn't defend His own people!

They thought God wouldn't, but that's exactly what He did. They wanted God to be their good luck charm. They wanted to keep on in immorality and injustice and use God.

But God's not here for us to use. We're here for Him to use.

Turn with me to **I Corinthians chapter 8 Pg. 1017**

The problem being addressed here was a question we don't specifically face today, but the principles are vitally important.

In the first century almost all of the meat sold in the market would have been offered up to a pagan idol. The first century Roman world had idolatry woven into its very fabric. Everything you did had some religious overtones.

So now here's a handful of pagans who had their lives radically changed by Jesus Christ. Now they're trying to live for God in a totally idolatrous environment.

What do you do about this meat offered to idols? What do you do about those things you're not quite sure of in the Christian life?

We're only going to look at one part of the answer to that question because the principles stretch over three chapters. But look at vs 4

Idols are just hunks of wood and stone. There's only one true God.

Read vs 5-6

Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda is the head of the Miami based "Growing In Grace International Ministry." He's got over 100,000 followers worldwide who believe He's Jesus Christ.

Hinduism has millions of gods and goddesses.

There always have been and always will be gods and lords. But for us there is only one true God and one true Lord. But not everybody knows that.

The point is going to be, even though an idol isn't really God, don't eat the meat offered to idols if causes confusion to other people who are still struggling with the idea of other gods.

What I want us to zero in on is the proposition in verse 6: *...there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

How did we get here? God created us. What's the source of life? God who is life. Why are we here? We're here *for Him*. God's not here for our benefit. We're here to serve Him.

We're here to worship God, to serve God, to draw attention to God, to spread the fame of God.

Israel kept missing the point because as a nation they kept getting caught up with religion. God told them that He was to be the object of their faith.

Their religion became the object of worship and many times God was just an after thought.

In Matthew four when Jesus was tempted by Satan and Satan said, "All these things I

will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

We weren’t created to worship religion, or self, or possessions, or our country, or our family. We we’re created to direct all of our worship, praise and adoration to God and God alone.

You know what the greatest privilege in all of life is? It’s not using God to get what we want, it’s allowing God to do what He wants through us.

I believe the problem Israel had is the same problem in religion in general.

God is an abstract concept. He’s not personal, there’s no chance of intimacy with Him. God is someone or something we serve in hopes of making our life better. But to most people God is like Fortuna.

If I can just influence Him in some way; light some candles, say some prayers, go on a pilgrimage, wash myself in the Ganges, put money in the offering, whatever my particular religion teaches me.

You know what the real key is to all of this?

I. The Myth: Following God Will Bring Good Luck

II. The Biblical Reality: You Can’t Use God. Let Him Use You

III. Pursuing The Way Of Truth Means Instead Of Getting Religion, Get Right With God

We’re not trapped by fate and we don’t have a Creator whose looking to be bribed or bought off.

Our Creator is God Himself. He is holy. He is just. he hates sin, and He is the epitome of love.

This Creator God made us to be intimately connected to Him. He created a perfect environment where Adam and Eve could walk and talk with Him in the cool of the garden.

This wasn’t a deal where Adam and Eve just talked to God when they needed something. This was an actual relationship between the Creator and the created ones.

It was only when Adam and Eve decided that there was something more important

than that relationship that it was broken. They decided that what they wanted was most important. They were willing to violate a clear command of God to get what they thought they wanted.

What they ended it up with a chasm between them, and God. They were on one side, God was on the other, and their sin stood in the middle.

All the joy of knowing God personally, all the peace of knowing you're where you need to be, was all gone in an instant.

From then on human history has been one long struggle trying to bridge that chasm. Religions are man's attempts to Get back to God.

The Bible's message is that God has already made the way back. Two thousand years ago God came to Earth as Jesus Christ. He lived a righteous life and then suffered in our place.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. I Peter 3:18.

The Bible says that on that cross Jesus paid the sin debt we owed. He died and rose again to offer eternal life freely to whosoever will.

Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything... Acts 13:39

Think about it, since God is perfect, He isn't looking for us to do something to restore the relationship with Him. He's provided the perfect offering of Himself.

What He is looking for is sincere worshippers. He's not looking for a friend who only comes to Him in those need and want, but during good times forgets that He even exists.

He's not looking for friends who seem so satisfied and fulfilled and who hang out with the ones they consider cooler friends. God's not wearing a sign that reads, "Use Me!"

God's done all the work. He's created, He's provided the sin offering, He promised to bless us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

God's looking for, and deserves, our genuine adoration and worship.

When we're worshipping God the focus is on Him and not on us. When we're worshipping the one who deserves all worship we're going to have the confidence to trust Him with our lives.

When we worshipping the King we'll understand that He has all authority. He's in control.

When we're worshipping the Savior we'll come to understand the full meaning of grace.

Grace is God's unearned, undeserved favor bought and paid for at the cross. At the cross God's holiness was satisfied and His love was freed up to be poured out on each of us. That means something that's absolutely crucial for us to understand. There's nothing we can do to cause God to love us. He loves us with a perfect love, that's what the cross is about.

There's nothing we can do to make God love us any more. There's nothing we can do to make God love us any less.

Life isn't about doing all the right things so that God will love us and bless us. It isn't "Follow God and He'll make good things happen in your life."

It's follow God because He already has done the greatest thing of all. Follow God because you've been bought with a price. Follow God because He so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son.

That's what we'll be doing for all eternity. Worshipping our God who gave Himself for us.

We close this morning with this amazing vision of eternity that's given to the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 5:11-13 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

Do you think God's here for you? Notice they're not gathered around you in eternity!