

The Lucky Ones

23 July 2006

Bible passage: **Philippians 4:8-9** (TEV)

"In conclusion, my friends, will your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you."

Sermon nugget: How does the right attitude help us deal with our problems and struggles, and how do we develop that kind of attitude?

INTRO/WELCOME

Good morning, and welcome to the Garden. If you were to write your own story, would you feel that your life had been filled with purpose and meaning? Would you feel that you had been blessed, even lucky, as this author puts it? (hold copy of "Lucky Man")

A few weeks ago, Rob French delivered a fine message at The Garden Beef & Boards location regarding luck. His take on luck is that God tips the scales and stacks the odds in our favor. God wants us to experience love and joy in this life, now. We can consider ourselves very lucky indeed when we know that all things work for good for those who love God.

But how is it that some people still think they are lucky, even in the face of adversity? Is it possible that a passion for life, a strong connection with family and friends who offer support, and a positive perspective regarding what is really important makes the difference in living a life of "good luck" or a life of tough breaks?

Today, we're doing something a bit different, which I suppose isn't all that unusual. We're using a recorded interview with a celebrity as the heart of our message. The story is that of the actor, Michael J. Fox, author of the book entitled "Lucky Man", and of his struggle to make it into the entertainment business, and the bigger struggle he now faces with Parkinsons Disease.

But before we get started with the video, let's take a few moments to spend in prayer.

VIDEO: Segment 1

"Inside the Actor's Studio" with Michael J. Fox

NARRATIVE 1: (1:00)

To achieve the kind of success Michael J Fox has had in his business, most of us realize the importance of mentors. I suspect that those of us who have been able to discover our life's passion can name the persons who encouraged us, the ones who saw something we didn't see, the ones who helped us get started.

However, just because someone has talent, and others see and recognize that talent, success doesn't necessarily come easily. In the pursuit of any dream, there are hardships and struggles that seem to go hand in hand. When Michael J. Fox left his home in Canada to try his hand at acting in L.A., he wasn't an overnight success. It was a journey.

NARRATIVE 2: (:30)

After a number of successes, ranging from Family Ties and Spin City on TV, and Back to the Future in the movies, Michael J. Fox was at the top of his business. How could anything go wrong? In the course of all of our lives, there are things we can control and things we cannot control. One of those things that was out of his control, literally and figuratively, struck the actor. The rest of us found out during his wildly successful run in "Spin City".

NARRATIVE 3: (3:00)

Michael J. Fox put in the same kind of effort many of us do when we discover that we have an illness that has the potential to be life-altering. We try to deny it; we try to hide it; we try to pretend it isn't serious, but at some point we have to face the harsh reality that our body or mind is failing us. Sometimes we react with anger and sometimes with fear, and almost always with sadness when we realize the sense of loss that we already know because of whatever we're facing.

However in every struggle, in every ounce of suffering is imbedded something totally opposite. There is the possibility for hope to emerge; there is the possibility for something good to come out of even the worst of tragedies. I believe that with all my heart, because I believe God can work within each of us to give us a whole new mindset, and to help us see the possibilities that we might never have seen before. It always depends on the attitude we nurture. J. Sidlow Baxter put it well when he wrote, "What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity? Our attitude toward it. Every opportunity has a difficulty and every difficulty has an opportunity."

It might be interesting for us to think about how we've responded when faced with difficult challenges? What has our attitude been? Using a very simplistic phrase, have we been able, by our attitudes to change lemons into lemonade?

In the book that Fox wrote, Lucky Man, he offers some advice for how to have a positive attitude and to turn the fortune of whatever we're facing. He writes: "Never play the result... For an actor, to play the result is to concentrate on where a character may find himself at the end of the scene or play, instead of where he is at a given point in the drama."

The long and short of what he's saying, whether we're currently facing a tough time or not, is to learn the secret of living in the present. There's no way we can know what the future will hold, and the only moment that any of us has in right now. What really matters is that we're fully in this moment, not the next, not the last, but this very moment. By staying in the present moment, we have the chance to be positive and hopeful about today and now.

In another place in the book, he says, "This was the lesson: it wasn't for me to fret about time or loss, but to appreciate each day, move forward, and have faith that something larger was at work, something with its own sense of timing and balance."

In many ways, this is what the writer of our Bible passage, Paul, is trying to say. Our version goes like this: "In conclusion, my friends, will your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you."

NARRATIVE 7:

I suspect that, if we were to have the chance to ask Michael J. Fox a question about where he is right now, he would answer very much like a quote of George Bernard Shaw that he uses toward the end Lucky Man. The first part of the quote goes this way: This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one..." He has taken a very difficult situation in his life, and by his attitude and actions, has turned that situation into something positive that can help others along the way. He has discovered a purpose beyond himself.

No matter what you and I are facing in life, we have that same opportunity. We, too, can offer ourselves in a way that will make others lives better and more hope-filled, if only we will.

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we can learn from whatever life brings us, and offer what we learn to help others.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.