

*Lew's Lines, June 2008*

# **Good Luck!?**

It was one of those unusual schedules that allowed plenty of time to travel from Big Sandy, TX to Wilmore, KY. In fact we had allotted two days as we would stop over in Missouri where friends would host us so we could have an early arrival the next day. We had only just passed Little Rock, Arkansas when the loud noise of an exploded tire caught our attention. Fortunately, being right by an exit ramp, we were able to pull off immediately, and with ample parking space, I unloaded the horses to take the weight off as we worked to change tires. The horses tied along a solid fence near an interstate exit soon caught the attention of passers-by. Of course Tumbleweed, our miniature horse, required a couple on a motorcycle to pull over for a closer inspection. This couple, normally preoccupied with many personal responsibilities, found themselves without children that night and decided to take a little excursion on their bike and came into our lives. Before we knew it, the gentleman went home and found some tools to help us. As a well established local, he also knew where we could house the horses for the night and before long, we found ourselves at the local fairgrounds, visiting and working on the damage done to the rig until 11:30 that evening. Not only had it flattened the tire, but it had also taken out a brake line, and the bearings and the next wheel were in question as well. Our newfound friend graciously set aside the resources so we could go to a parts shop in the morning and hopefully be on our way early; but it was not to be.

He rolled in at 7:00 am the next morning, taking the day off work because he felt so burdened to help us out. This former, total stranger spent the entire morning helping us get parts, and in the process found another leak in our brake line on the opposite side. Finally, after two repaired brake lines, three replaced tires, and one new bearing, we were back on the road again. During the course of our conversation we learned that this man was a line worker for the local power company and his wife worked at a bank. We told him how much we respected those who serve us on the power lines because it seems they have one of the most dangerous jobs during the most difficult weather patterns. We asked for the privilege of praying for him and his crew before we left. Little did we realize that two days later a major storm would go through the area and cause great devastation, but that they would find themselves protected from the damages. He credited God for answering our prayers on their behalf. Good luck? I don't think so. Not only was our need met by the volunteer spirit of these passers-by, but also needs in their lives were met through friendship and encouragement shared during the process and subsequently.

Sometimes adverse circumstances are hard to understand, and sometimes we do not always see the correlations between circumstances, a right response, and the work that God is doing. Let me highlight just a few of those correlations. In Exodus 3:2, God uses the circumstance of a burning bush to capture Moses' attention; when he turned aside to take a closer look, God spoke to Him. In the book of Ruth, we learn of a Moabite woman who returned to Israel with her mother-in-law after the loss of her husband. She was sent to glean wheat, but "it just so happened" that she gleaned in the field of Boaz who "just so happened" to be a relative. She captured the attention of Boaz who eventually became her husband. Good Luck? I don't believe so. In I Samuel 9, Saul was sent by his father to look for his lost donkeys. While Saul was traveling to and fro and not finding the donkeys, God told Samuel to anoint Saul as king. When Saul found himself near the city where Samuel lived he sought him out for advice on where his donkeys were hidden, but to Saul's surprise, Samuel was expecting him. God used the circumstance of the lost donkeys to bring Saul to Samuel where he could anoint him to be the first king of Israel. In Genesis 24, when Abraham was looking for a wife for his son, he commissioned his servant Eleazar to go to a foreign land to look for a suitable wife. The very first woman he met "just so happened" to be the daughter of Abraham's brother Laban and it "just so happened" that she responded according to the prayer of Eliezer thereby

validating God's hand in choosing her to be the wife for Isaac. Good luck? I don't think so. Indeed this was good fortune for Isaac, but luck had nothing to do with it.

God works on our behalf and moves heaven and earth to honor those who honor Him. Though we understand little about our circumstances sometimes, the truth of it is, who can afford to be without the favor of God upon their life? Acts 17:28 says that in Him we live and move and exist. Indeed if one were to search even in the most shallow way, the circumstances that fulfill the prophecies of Christ are so extreme, that one cannot help but realize there are no such things as mere coincidences regarding His coming, His life, or His resurrection. Though we cannot understand all our circumstances, we can trust the one who is God of all circumstances. The Bible tells us to give thanks in all things for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Giving thanks is not because we understand everything or because it always makes sense or even because it works out, but because it demonstrates our trust in a sovereign God despite the initial appearance of things. Giving thanks even amidst uncertain outcomes is the highest expression of true submission. We find Jesus Christ repeatedly thanking the Father for the way He revealed things to children and not to wise people and for the way He worked through circumstances and not according to the wisdom of mankind. God allows the circumstances of our lives to test the hearts of men.

One of the most remarkable expressions of God using circumstances comes out of an incident in I Samuel regarding the Ark of the Lord during a war with the Philistines. Israel did not know that the house of Eli had been judged by God, but was distraught by their losses in the battle field. They reasoned that if they could have the Ark of the Covenant with them, than surely they would win, so they sent for the Ark and went out to battle. However, the Philistines had heard their cry, and knowing the power of their God, they purposed to fight for their lives lest they become slaves of Israel. That day Israel was defeated, the sons of Eli, Hophne and Phinehas, were killed, and the Ark was taken by the Philistines. Now the Philistines not only had possession of the Ark, but thought they had actually conquered Israel's God. But when they brought the Ark and set it before their god, Dagon, the statue of Dagon fell on its face. They set it up again the next morning, and not only did it fall over the following night, but this time, the head and hands were broken off by the fall. A plague then broke out among the Philistines and caused a great uproar. So they sent the ark from one Philistine city to another with the same results. The Philistines realized that while they could conquer Israel, they could not conquer Israel's God, and therefore purposed to return the Ark to Israel with appropriate sacrifices to God because they believed their circumstances to be the judgment of God. They hitched a cart with two milk cows that had never been under yoke and took their calves from them, reasoning that if the cows would go to Israel, then this truly was a judgment of God and He would receive their sacrifice. Five lords of the Philistines watched as the two milk cows submitted to the harness and took the cart holding the Ark of the Covenant straight to Israel, lowing as they left their calves behind. They watched as Israel took the wood of the cart and sacrificed the two milk cows. The result for the cows was not a pleasant ending, yet they glorified God in their lowly obedience. After the Israelites had accepted the return of the ark and praised God for it, they presumed upon Him and 50,070 men died from looking upon and not respecting the holiness of God and the ark which represented His presence. God used the circumstances with the fallen idol and the plagues to show the Philistines that He is the supreme God. 50,070 Israelites died to show Israel that He was not to be trifled with.

In conclusion we understand that both Israel and the Philistines made an attempt to understand God through their circumstances. But apart from God's word and counsel through the witness of the Spirit, it is very difficult to interpret God. What is important to remember is that God has appointed the times and boundaries of our habitations so that we should seek God, and perhaps we may grope for Him and find Him for He is not far from each one of us and in Him we live and move and exist. It is God's purpose to expose our ignorance and to teach us to seek His face rather than to come to our own woeful conclusions based on our own piety or perverseness (Acts 17:26-31). In essence we learn a lesson from even the cows as through these circumstances the Philistines, the Israelites, and the cows all died – the Philistines from rebellion, the Israelites from presumption, and the cows from obedience. But how are we going to interpret God and view life? Through the grid of our circumstances and past experiences? Or through His Word and Spirit?