

LUCKY OR BLESSED?

I shared with everyone in last week's message how my family was on vacation in Las Vegas from August 15-20th. What none of the travel guides shared about a vacation in Las Vegas is to expect a hurricane to occur there every 84 years. There was no mention of Hurricane Hilary before we left Brantford, but by Friday we were beginning to see warnings and experiencing some rainfall and flooding in parts of Las Vegas.

On Saturday the local news was predicting the worst of the hurricane's impact would occur on Sunday and to expect delays and interruptions with respect to travel. Our flight was booked to leave Las Vegas Sunday night at 11:15 p.m. We considered leaving a day early, but we had tickets to a show on Saturday night that we were all looking forward to. We would have been truly disappointed to miss seeing it. I am glad we did not miss it because afterward my daughter said it was the best show she has ever seen.

Having made the decision to stay through to the Sunday as originally planned, we began doing some serious praying hoping we would still be able to leave Las Vegas on our scheduled flight. On Sunday morning we began to see that many of the flights were either delayed or cancelled. This was a surprise considering the weather was actually quite nice in Las Vegas. The rain was holding off and we were able to spend a portion of the afternoon doing a few last things on the Las Vegas strip. We kept checking our flight status throughout the day and it kept showing that it was on time.

When we got to the airport that night, we were told by the WestJet staff that our flight was still on time and how it was the only one all day that had not been cancelled or delayed. Thankfully we were able to leave Las Vegas as scheduled and arrived in Toronto Monday morning at 6:30 a.m. Nadine and I realized how blessed we were by God to help us arrive home safely and on time despite the rare occurrence of a hurricane hitting the area while we were there.

In the days that followed, many family members and friends naturally asked how our trip went. Some of these people were aware of the hurricane hitting the area while we were there. What I found interesting is that when many of these people heard that our flight was the only one not delayed or cancelled

all day their response was, "You were lucky!" Every time somebody said this, I responded, "No, we were blessed by God!" This is how I perceived it right from the very beginning. When we booked the trip, I was not crazy about flying back over night but it was the only option that fit into our travel budget. God knew ahead of time about the impending hurricane and He also understood the emotional impact it would have had on us if our flight had been delayed or cancelled. We prayed through the days leading up to our return flight which helped us to see our situation from the viewpoint of a blessing from God and not simply as coincidence or luck.

It has been a week since we returned home, and I am still telling people it was a blessing from God that it happened the way it did. This experience has got me thinking how important it is for us as believers to see the ways God is at work blessing us. If I had viewed the situation from the perspective of just good luck or fortune I would have missed out on:

- being reminded that God is all-knowing and how His hand was involved in planning the return flight for us when He did,
- being comforted through prayer that God was watching over us,
- having my faith strengthened even more that my trust in God is well placed,
- being able to share and witness to others how God goes about blessing us and to give Him the glory by so doing.

In order to experience these things in our faith journey it is important that we truly recognize when God is blessing us instead of looking at it in terms of luck. With this truth in mind, a question we need to ask ourselves is how well do we recognize the times when God is blessing us? We may think we always recognize when God is blessing us, but many of the people who told me we were lucky happened to be believers themselves. By failing to recognize when God is blessing us we may fall into the pattern of taking Him for granted in our lives instead of drawing closer to Him. If we are failing to see God's blessing in our lives Psalm 95 reveals the following reasons for why this may be the case:

1. Hearts that have become ungrateful (vs. 2)
2. Hearts that have become hardened due to doubts (vs. 8)
3. Not truly worshiping or submitting to Him (vs. 6).

Maybe one of these factors may be the reason for why we are failing to recognize when God is blessing us in life. God in His abundant care and mercy showers so many blessings upon us. They are there for the seeing. They are meant to strengthen our faith, draw us closer to Him, and sustain us with hope and peace regardless of the situations we are facing.

God blessed us in a way that only He could by helping us through those final days in Las Vegas as the hurricane was approaching. It was not the only blessing God provided us while we were away. Heavy rains came down in Brantford too while we were gone. We received a message from our neighbours who were watching our house that water came into our basement. They wanted us to know, but not to be worried as they were looking after cleaning it up. God has blessed us with some special neighbours who would do that for us while we were away. That is how I see it. Luck has nothing to do with it. Let's make sure we are seeing the ways God is blessing us. It makes a real difference as we go through the flood waters of life.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean