



Sometimes what appears to be a fortunate event turns out to be too good to be true. The recent news had a number of stories about sweet promises having bitter consequences.

Euros from Heaven?—Some are calling it the miracle of the coins. While Italy and some other European nations are facing uncertain economic times, some motorists benefited from an unexpected windfall. An armored truck carrying 2.5 million euros overturned on a highway in southern Italy. In the accident the truck’s rear door popped open and spilled thousands of one-and two-euro coins on the highway. Before police arrived, motorists stopped their cars and made off with about 10,000 euros.

Because of a severe budget crisis, Italian citizens will soon have to make sacrifices because the government has spent more than it has collected in taxes. While this “miracle” gave a short-term gain to a few citizens, it actually made the budget crisis slightly worse since the loss added to government debt!

Grilling the messenger?—Many Germans were thrilled when an octopus in an Oberhausen aquarium correctly predicted victories for their team in the 2010 World Cup soccer tournament. But when “Phil” correctly prognosticated a *loss*, angry fans began demanding that he be cooked and eaten.

During the tournament, the octopus was given the choice of picking food from two different transparent containers lowered into his tank. One container had a German flag on it and one had the opponent’s flag. The container Phil opened first was considered to be his pick to win the match. The country was furious when he picked Spain to win after correctly forecasting German wins over Argentina, England, Ghana, and Australia. Some soccer commentators speculated that the octopus’s prediction of a German loss influenced some of the more superstitious players, contributing to their defeat.

Enlightened soles?—Alessandro Di Priamo, a former athlete turned motivational trainer for companies, promised participants in his seminar increased confidence and success. Instead he gave them burned feet.

A “motivation day” organized by one of Italy’s biggest real estate agencies ended in tears and scars when nine salespeople had to be treated in hospitals after walking barefoot on a bed of hot coals. Di Priamo said the hotel near Rome where his seminar was held used the wrong kind of wood and some artificial coal without him knowing. “I have done this job for 12 years with thousands of people and never had a problem,” said De Priamo.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above news story to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

Sometimes we talk about an offer or event having “strings attached.” What do we mean by that? Looking at one or more of the stories above, talk about the unexpected “strings” that came with each event described.

Have you ever been disappointed by advertisements, political promises, or product claims that turned out to be too good to be true? Tell about such a time. How have events like that made you skeptical of promises?

Sometimes our experiences cause us to become cynical. We may say, “If something seems too good to be true, it probably is!” But a parable of Jesus teaches us that God’s promise of grace, while outrageous, is nonetheless true.