

## A LESSON FROM A HOMELESS MAN

Isn't it funny how God can speak to us in those most unexpected moments?

About a month ago Marilyn and I were driving home on a Sunday afternoon more typical of mid January than early December. It was cold and the wind seemed to have teeth. He had gone out for dinner and to do some visitation after church. I was ready for some football and some rest. As we drove toward the church we noticed a police car in the opposite lane parked at the I-90 underpass on Highway 14. His emergency lights were on. As we drove pass, Marilyn noticed that the officer was standing by a gentleman who was in a sleeping bag up near the top of the underside of the bridge. I told her that I was going to go back and put the man up in a room for the night. After some red lights and a no U-Turn sign, I eventually was able to make my way back to the squad car. As we pulled up, another officer pulled in behind me with his lights on as well. I introduced myself to the second officer and told him of my concerns about the man sleeping out in the cold. I also told him that I would be happy to get the fellow a room for the night. He took my business card and went up to assist the other cop. I waited down by the highway.

I left Marilyn in the car parked between the two police cars. It looked like she had been stopped on a drug bust or something.

After repeated attempts, the two officers were finally able to get the sleeping man to wake up. They actually thought, for a moment, that he might be dead. If that had been the case, then I wasn't going to go through with the motel and food thing. I didn't see any farther need. Understand? Anyway, when Rip Van Winkle did finally come around, he would say very little. He did volunteer that the day before he had lost his job at one of the local fast food joints and that the night before was his first night out under the bridge. They told him that he couldn't spend another night there. He would have to gather his stuff together and leave. He had some of this and that stuck up between the girders under the highway. He also had a bike. He loaded everything on the cycle and started to leave when they told him of my offer. He didn't say anything, rather he just started to ride away.

As he rode down to where I was, I tried to get him to stop. I told him that I was a minister and that I wanted to put him up in a motel for the night. I also wanted to buy him a hot meal. However, as I spoke to him, he simply looked right through me and kept on riding. The officers thanked me for my efforts and told me that maybe he just didn't like cops.

I got back in my warm Jeep and Marilyn and I decided to try to intercept him once again. He turned left off of Highway 14 toward McDonalds. We turned left there too. I pulled in the parking lot, stopped, and got out of the vehicle just in time to catch him as started to ride by. Again, I told him that I was a pastor and that I wanted to give him a warm place to stay. I also wanted to buy him something to eat. Remember, it was cold. I wanted to be back in my car, but at the same time I really did want to try to get the man some help.

As before, he refused to talk. He never said one single word to me. Not one.

- He didn't thank me.
- He didn't say that he would get back to me.
- He didn't tell me to go jump in the lake.

No, he simply kept riding his bike on down and then across the street. After that we headed for home and for the fourth quarter. We knew that there was no farther use in trying to talk to the fellow. He would rather freeze than accept my free offer of kindness. He would rather sleep under a bridge on a cold night than surrender to my act of grace. The next day he was back up under the bridge and once again the police were there talking to him. I was told about it, but I left him alone.

I really carried a burden for that young man. (The police told me that his name was Jim.) I prayed for him several times. At the same time, I knew that I had done everything that I could do. His refusals tied my hands.

Think with me now. I offered the man a free gift – lodging and a meal. It was simply there for the taking -- . it would have cost him nothing.

- All that he had to do was receive it.
- He hadn't ask for it.
- He didn't deserve it.
- He hadn't earned it.
- I didn't even know the person nor did he know me.

All that he needed to do in order to keep himself warm for the night was to say yes. Yet he refused the offer.

One night as I was home laying in my own warm bed thinking about Jim, the Lord spoke to my heart. He reminded me that He too had come to offer aid. John 1:14 says that **“The Word (Jesus) became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** That is the heart and essence of Christmas. God became man. He became one with us.

- He offered salvation and free healing.
- He offered love from God and eternal life.
- He offered peace of mind and everlasting joy.

He offered it all – freely. He did everything that was within His awesome power to get men and women, boys and girls to stop, listen, and accept His grace.

The Bible says in John 1:11 (*The Message*) that **“He came to his own people, but they didn't want him.”** Eventually He died on a cruel and rugged cross. He offered so much and asked for so little. Still, like the homeless man, so many people today just get on their bikes and ride away.

Every so often someone asks me about how a loving God could be so cruel as to send someone to an everlasting hell. Listen. God doesn't send people there, anymore than I sent that homeless man out into the cold. He chose to ride off. I did everything that I could except stand on my head to help the man. He just did not want my help. In like fashion, God has done everything that He could including sending His Only Begotten Son to earth to live and die for us. If anyone dies and goes into a Christless eternity, it is not God's doing. It simply reflects humanity's freedom to choose Christ or to reject Christ.

This Christmas it is God who is offering the greatest gift of all. His gift beats a night at Motel 6 and a meal at McDonalds. The gift is simply there for the talking. Will you receive the Lord's gift of salvation this evening?