

A Hobo's Gift

David Watson had a good problem. The church he'd been pastoring in Girard, Pa., Bethel Assembly of God, needed more space for its exploding youth ministry. Though they had just built a new sanctuary, the church agreed as a step of faith to build a new youth center without borrowing any money.

It was necessary, however, to hire out the job of laying the trusses, so Watson met with a construction firm that claimed to be a Christian company. He thought they made a clear verbal agreement that since the church had only \$10,000 to spend, no additional work beyond the trusses should be done.

Watson went on a ministry trip while the work was hired out—and what he saw when he returned stunned him.

Not only were the trusses laid, but the entire roof had been constructed and shingled.

"It scared me," he says. "I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach."

Waiting on his desk was a bill from the company for an additional \$10,000. In a panic, the pastor called the company, but they threatened to sue if he didn't pay up.

"I felt alone," Watson says. His trusting spirit had been betrayed, and he felt isolated from everyone, even God. Watson called an emergency board meeting for the next day, desperately apologizing and asking for guidance. He couldn't stop thinking, *My ministry is over, and it hasn't even started.*

A month later, with the payment deadline looming and no money to pay the bill, Watson received a call from a stranger who offered to take him to lunch. Suddenly, Watson was hopeful.

But at noon the next day, when he opened the door to meet his

new friend, standing before him was a man Watson describes as a vagrant.

The stranger handed Watson a rusty tin can and said, "Instead of taking you to lunch, I've brought lunch to you."

The town was accustomed to transients riding the rails, so when Watson invited the smelly man with torn, dirty clothes and decaying teeth to come inside, disappointment came in the door along with him.

"I was so taken aback, so desperate, I never even asked his name," Watson admits. But with a shepherd's heart, he listened to the man's stories about his life as a transient, how he was once homeless and slept under bridges, and the people he'd met along his travels.

"This journey of mumbling took about a half an hour," Watson quips.

Then, suddenly, the man looked at the clock and announced, "My time is up. I have to go."

At that moment, the phone rang and the stranger slipped out of sight.

"It was just seconds, really," Watson says. When he looked down the hallway and scanned the lone road that led to the church, the man was nowhere to be found.

The next board meeting was a somber occasion. The board members hadn't raised a dime to pay what was owed, and they were out of ideas. Then the treasurer noticed the tin can on Watson's desk.

"What's in it?" he asked.

Frankly, Watson didn't want to know. Although the can was factory-sealed, it was dirty and rusty and had no label. It was anybody's guess how old the contents were.

The treasurer pressed into the lid with a can opener, and everyone in the room heard the hiss of a vacuum seal.

“All of us were ready for a stench, but there was no stench,” Watson says.

Instead of slimy old beans, the can was full of crisp \$100 bills—totaling \$10,000.

“We just sat there, stunned!” Watson crows. “It was as close to a holy place as I’d ever been. We realized something beyond us had taken place.”

The story went public, but the vagrant was never identified.

“I really felt that it was an angel,” Watson says. “An angel that smelled and had rotten teeth!”

But Watson realizes those things don’t matter because God had come on the scene to show His faithfulness when the church’s ministry and the pastor’s future were at stake.

“I’m not the same person that I was before that rusty tin can arrived,” he says. “My faith is not in religion or people, but in God.”

Today, as the director of pastoral studies at North Central University in Minneapolis, Minn., Watson exhorts his students to focus on God, the giver of all gifts.

“Keep your eyes on Him,” he says, “because He is the God of miracles.”

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