

The Tin Cup

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Donald walked along the street in front of the massive building that housed his multi-national investment firm and grumbled to himself from inside his expensive, custom tailored winter jacket.

"What a lousy day for the limo to break down," he muttered to himself.

He pulled a small device out of his pocket and pressed the record button.

"Note to self. Fire the mechanic for being an idiot. Oh, and shift the core assets of the McGondal account. We need to maximize those profits as quickly as possible before someone gets the bright idea to cash it in to help out Foodbank. The last thing we need is someone else wasting perfectly good food on another group of worthless beggars."

He pressed the stop button as a shiver of cold trickled through his body. He then looked around at the abandoned streets and wondered where his ride was. A gust of wind grabbed a nearby pile of snow, lifted it in the air and tossed it at him as though it were starting a gigantic snowball fight. Donald grumbled inwardly as the cold nipped painfully at his face. He reached into his pocket and grabbed his cell phone. He was going to give someone a piece of his mind for this affront to his person. Nobody left him just standing out here like this freezing to death! He flipped open his phone and stared in disbelief at its display. He had no signal, and in the middle of Manhattan of all places!

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me!" he growled.

The wind again threw a pile of snow at him and seemed to laugh in his ear as he retreated deeper into his coat to fend off the cold. He looked desperately up and down the street both ways in search of the sedan that was to take him home in time for Christmas eve. But there was no sign of it anywhere. In fact, there wasn't even a single car or sign of life anywhere. The canyons of New York were literally a ghost town. Deciding not to brave the cold any longer, he turned back to the building and tried to go back inside. But to his dismay the doors were locked. Inside it was dark, and there was no sign of the guard staff anywhere.

"Blasted rent-a-cops. I'll have to speak with the landlord about them! This is intolerable!" he roared.

The snow seemed to laugh at his predicament and then dumped another frigid dose of snow down his collar. Donald squirmed in discomfort as the icy blast invaded his coat and spilled down his back. He pulled out his cell phone again, but found that he still had no signal.

"I make millions of dollars every second, and yet I stand here like a common beggar on the street freezing my skin off because those morons at the phone company can't keep their gear properly maintained!" he roared in frustration.

"Millions per second, eh? You sound fairly successful," came a voice behind him.

Donald spun in surprise to find a fairly shabbily dressed man with a dirty face and crooked teeth staring back at him.

"Oh great. Not only am I left to freeze, now I'm being mugged too!" he thought. "Yes, I make lots of money. What's it to you? Do you want my wallet!?" he screamed.

But the man only laughed. This puzzled Donald.

"Not at all. I just saw that you were cold and thought that you might want a little shelter while you wait for your ride," said the man.

Donald cocked his head slightly.

"Are you one of the maintenance people from the building?" he asked.

The man chuckled.

"No, just a wanderer who's taking a break from the cold," said the man. He then gestured to his right, and said, "My home is over here. You're welcome to join me if you like."

Donald cocked an eyebrow curiously, and then looked in the direction that the man had gestured. To his surprise, leaning against the building as though it were part of it, stood a ragged, wind whipped little cloth hut. Donald was puzzled by this, as it hadn't been there a few moments ago, and yet now it was. Either that or his powers of observation were getting a bit rusty. An angry grunt escaped his lips. He would have to ensure that the guards got rid of this riffraff as soon as feasibly possible. He didn't need someone like this scaring away potential customers.

"No thank you. I don't associate with your kind," huffed Donald.

The man tipped his ragged cap slightly, and asked, "What type is that?"

But Donald didn't reply. He only huffed and looked away. The wind blasted him again with another shot of icy bitterness that invaded every inch of his body. He began to shiver heavily. But he stubbornly refused to give in to the man's kind gestures.

"Well, if you decide you want to come get warm, I'll be inside fixing myself some soup," said the man.

He then turned and slipped inside his humble little cloth hut. Donald shivered heavily despite his thick winter coat as his teeth chattered incessantly.

"Three grand for a coat and the blasted thing doesn't even keep me decently warm," he thought in dismay.

Then the man's offer echoed in his head. He glanced quickly over at the humble little hut and spotted steam seeping from its edges. The idea of warmth, even inside such a lowly little structure, made his body want to turn and march right over there despite his reservations. But his pride was stronger and resisted his body's pleadings for warmth. He turned away and tried to take his mind off the cold that was quickly overwhelming his body. In all his years of life he had never been this cold, and it bothered him. Would he catch hypothermia, or worse, freeze to death? He considered taking the man up on his offer, but again his pride prevented him from moving.

Just then the wind rushed in, split open his jacket and poured another healthy dose of snow and chill down across his chest and back. His body had finally had enough and, with one quick bust of willpower, overruled his pride, sending his feet and his body marching quickly towards the warm, inviting little hut. Donald slipped cautiously through the door of the hut, and then recoiled in surprise. It stank inside, like a thousand unwashed bodies piled up on top of each other and doused with an extra dose of bodily funk just for good measure. He did all he could to resist the urge to extricate the remnants of his lunch onto the sidewalk.

He wanted to quickly retreat, to take his chances with the cold rather than suffer through this odoriferous abomination. But his body once again overruled his pride and he found himself sitting on a very warm metal grate over which the hut had been erected. It was one of the air exchange vents from the building. He had forgotten it was even there, and quietly applauded the strange beggar for his excellent choice of camping sites, much to his own surprise. The warmth of the exhaust vent quickly filled his entire body with its gentle heat.

He then looked to his left and spotted the beggar stirring a small tin cup full of soup next to him. Below it sat a ragged old tin can filled with candles that acted as an improvised stove. The beggar leaned over and sniffed at the soup. It smelled cheap and oily to Donald, but to the beggar next to him it smelled like a king's feast.

"Why are you out here?" asked Donald after several moments.

"What do you mean?" asked the man as he took a spoon full of the soup and tasted it.

"I mean, why are you living here like this? Can't you get a job?" he growled with disdain.

The man smiled kindly.

"I have no problem getting a job. In fact, I have had many."

"But you couldn't keep them."

"Actually, I chose not to."

This puzzled Donald.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

The man picked up the small tin cup and took a sip of his soup. He studied it with interest as fond memories of the past washed over his mind. He then set it down again on the stove.

"Once, long ago, I had great riches like you do. I was a very successful man and made an incredible fortune. I even lived in mansions and drove expensive cars."

"So what happened? Did your company fail? Or did your riches get wiped out in a stock market crash?" asked Donald.

"Actually, I found God. Strangely enough, I meet him through the kindness of a street beggar much like myself."

Donald looked at the man incredulously.

"So you found religion, and then decided to give up everything. How stupid is that," he grumbled.

The man shook his head.

"It's not stupid at all. In fact, it's the best thing that ever happened to me."

Donald furrowed his brow.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, before I found God...the real God I mean, I had another god in my life: Money. I worshiped it every day in stock exchanges, corporate buyouts and the ritzy life style. I loved it so much that I could never have enough. But then one day I found myself out on the street, much as you were today, shivering in the cold waiting on someone to pick me up. It was then that I meet a tired old street beggar who shared an interesting thing with me."

He picked up his tin cup and sipped at it, savoring the warm goodness that flowed from it and into his body. He placed it down again onto the stove.

"Do you realize that, no matter how much wealth you obtain, it's a drop of water in comparison to the vast ocean of riches God possesses; a speck of dirt in comparison to his mountain of gold? He is richer than all the world's rulers and all the great men of this world combined. However, it is not his riches that make him happy."

Donald blinked in surprise.

"I would think that with a fortune that great he would be happiest of all men...or gods in his case."

The man laughed and shook his head.

"It's not riches that make God happy. It's love. Specifically his love for us."

Donald contemplated this. He could understand where love might make someone happier than riches ever could. But he couldn't imagine how. He then cocked an eyebrow in disbelief.

"What makes you think that love made him happier than riches ever could?" he asked.

The man looked at him and smiled.

"Because He sent His Son to our world to redeem us."

Donald huffed arrogantly.

"Oh, let me guess. You're going to give me the 'God' speech, aren't you?"

The man shook his head.

"No, I'm not."

"But you were just about to talk about God's Son....uh, what's his name..."

"Jesus."

"Yeah, him."

The man nodded.

"I was. However, it was not to give you any kind of speech. I merely wanted to share with you what He did to show you that love was worth more to Him than even the greatest riches."

Donald waved dismissively and then stepped out of the hut.

"Go spew your nonsense to someone else," he said as the cold, December air once again

attacked him from all sides.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone again. Still no signal. He walked over to the door of the building and banged on the glass. Nothing. He peeked inside. Nobody was around. He looked up and down the street in both directions. Nobody. There wasn't even a car in sight, and the streets around him were empty. The wind slammed into him again, once more invading the warm solitude of his jacket with the cold iciness of deep winter. His body began to shiver again. He glanced over at the man's warm, inviting hut and sighed in frustration. He marched across the frozen, snow covered sidewalk and slipped inside the warmth of the hut.

It was better to be audibly assaulted by foolishness than freeze to death outside. He sat down again on the heat grate and sighed as the warmth coming up from it once again warmed his body. He looked over at the man and watched as he bowed his head and gave a prayer of thanks for his meager meal, and then gladly consumed his small tin cup worth of soup. Donald sighed in frustration.

"Well, since I'm obviously stuck here with you for the moment, why don't you humor me by sharing the rest of your little story," he said gruffly.

The man smiled.

"You've heard the Christmas story before, haven't you?"

Donald nodded.

"Who hasn't?" he grumbled.

"Well, it might surprise you to know that quite a few have not. It's why I do what I do, to share the goodness of God with everyone."

"And his love, right?"

The man nodded.

"The greatest of treasures."

"So what is it that He did to show that love was far more precious to Him than even the greatest riches?"

"By giving us His Son."

Donald blinked in confusion.

"I don't understand."

"Over two thousand years ago, God sent Jesus to this world to die for all of us so that we could be saved. God loved us so much that he would give up everything just to restore us to him."

"If we needed restoring, I assume that we did something to separate ourselves from him."

"We did. It's called sin. All of us are guilty of it, from the greatest to the least. It is that sin which separates us from him, no matter who we are. Paul once said that he felt like the worst sinner in the world."

The man looked down at his tin up and sighed heavily.

"Much like him, I too feel as though I am the greatest of sinners, having committed some of the most heinous sins in all of history."

Donald cocked an eyebrow in interest, but didn't feel brave enough to ask the man what he'd done to feel this way. He figured it was safer not knowing.

"So what else did he do that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that love was more important to him than all his riches?" he asked.

The man put his cup onto the small stove, and then blew out the candles underneath.

"He was born in a stable to a peasant woman from the poorest of families, laid in a feed trough, presented first to the lowest of men, raised in poverty and obscurity, lived a life of sacrifice, and died on a rugged cross between two criminals in the most painful and humiliating way possible at the time. He could have been born to a king, lived in a palace, or taken control of a great kingdom. Being greater than all the kings of the world, He could have lived a life of opulent luxury. But He chose to live a life of poverty, choosing to express His incredible love to us through dirty feet and calloused hands. When He was on this Earth, He was born with nothing, owning nothing, and died with nothing.

The only thing that He truly owned was His body, and He even sacrificed that to show how much love meant to Him, while at the same time showing how little value riches had to him."

A tear formed in Donald's eye. He marveled at the idea that someone could value love so highly above anything else, and then go so far to prove that to everyone who was willing to see. A strange warmth invaded his body as more tears began to fill his eyes. Feeling sorry for the man, he reached into his wallet and pulled out a pair of hundred dollar bills. But as he held them out to the man, he was surprised to see him shake his head and wave his hand in refusal.

"No thank you. I don't need your charity," said the man.

"But you are so poor. I'm certain that you could use the money to buy yourself some new cloths, or even some food," said Donald in concern.

The man laughed.

"I'm actually quite rich, so I don't need your money. Although I do appreciate your charity."

"But you have nothing!"

"I have Jesus, and that is all I need. Well, and I also have a nice fat bank account as well."

Donald blinked in surprise.

"You're rich!?" he exclaimed.

"Quite comfortably so, actually," said the man with a sigh.

"But...but...why live like this if you're so well off?"

A tear formed in the man's eyes.

"Because, I am not worthy to enjoy such riches when so many live daily with barely a cup full of food to sustain their bodies." He gestured to the cloth hut around him, and said, "I live like this every year around Christmas to remind me that money is not my god, nor riches the greatest treasure that I have. If Jesus could live a life of poverty in order to show the world how much more valuable love is, then I have no reservation in making myself a pauper for a brief period each year to remind me that my riches are not my greatest treasure. Jesus is."

Tears began to flow from Donald's eyes as the ice that filled his cold, dark heart melted into a warm flood of joy. The man studied Donald's expression and then perked up slightly.

"You know of Jesus, don't you?"

Donald nodded slightly.

"My grandmother told me about him when I was a child. But my greed blinded me. I felt that nothing was more important to me than getting everything I ever wanted: riches, power, and fame. But now I see that those really mean nothing."

Just then a car horn beeped outside.

"Mr. Burger, are you here?" came a voice through the cold, snowy wind outside.

"Are they calling for you?" asked the man.

Donald sighed ashamedly, and nodded.

"That's my driver. He was supposed to be here twenty minutes ago to pick me up. But the limo broke down, so he was delayed while he found another car."

Just then his phone rang. He picked it up, talked briefly with someone on the other end, and then hung up. He sighed, and then smiled slightly. Suddenly an idea struck him.

"Would you like a warm place to stay and a hot meal?" he asked.

The man shook his head.

"I am fine here. God has provided greatly for me, so I am content sleeping here for the night."

Donald snorted dismissively.

"Nonsense. You're coming home with me. You need a better place to stay than this. Besides, I want you to tell me more about the love Jesus valued so highly."

The man smiled and nodded.

"Well, in that case, I will come."

Donald smiled, began to stand, and then paused.

"Oh, one more thing before we go. I haven't asked you your name."
The man smiled kindly, and said, "Would you believe it's Gabriel?"
Donald laughed.
"Given that it's Christmas eve, it wouldn't surprise me at all."

The End