

2008, 2-17 Accept a gift with faith Rom4v1 (Lent 2)

My very first job was working for Dial/Tent and Awning. It was a summer job. We worked outside setting up tents for the most part. It was a little different getting used to the work atmosphere. But it was all worth it for that first pay check. I had worked for an entire month before I finally saw that first whopping check. At that time I didn't have to pay rent, I didn't have to pay for a car, so I could spend my money on whatever I wanted. I could spend it on clothes, sporting goods, candy or whatever.

After the summer I started working two jobs in Big Rapids Michigan when I went to Ferris State. My fun job was working at the Ice arena. My money making job was working at Burger King in the middle of the night on the weekends. All those paychecks were helped pay for school. I worked a lot because I wanted to earn as much money as possible. It was great to see those paychecks, even the small ones from the Ice Arena. It really added up.

My next job was at a gas station. I really racked up the hours there. With every job I had the paychecks got larger and larger. When I figured out that I could work overtime, I was rolling in the cash. I still had to pay for school and by this time a car, but I felt like I could really take care of myself.

I also worked at a couple of Jobs that involved tips. That was interesting because I would perform well in order to make more money. I also worked in a job where I worked my way up in seniority. I got paid more, plus I could tell other people what to do.

But with every job I expected a compensation for the work I did. Generally working hard paid off. When I received money for working it was never a gift, it was a paycheck.

Some of the youth went to Youth Gathering and might remember one of the speakers. His message had a recurring theme. If you have to work for it, it is not a gift, it's a paycheck.

That is exactly what Romans four verse four says, "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation." This is the life we have grown accustomed too. We work, we get paid.

And no matter how many times we hear that God's love is a gift, we often act otherwise. We work hard for God, thinking we will receive special rewards. We often live as if God is obligated to reward us for the things we do.

The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming.

Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was stung with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

Sometimes we practically give up on God and think it is time to take care of ourselves. But God, in his undeserved love, burns up those filthy rags and saves us from our prideful and thankless hearts.

David knew what he was talking about when he talked about being blessed. He was a great king, one of the best Israel ever had. He acted so noble, honoring king Saul, even though Saul was out to kill David. He followed God's commands and honored God's decrees. Yet David realized his sin, his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and his sin of murdering Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.

David realized God's way was through forgiveness. David knew he didn't deserve it. He didn't earn it. God was not obligated to forgive him. It was a gift.

Abraham also was working under the understanding that God's blessings to him was a gift. He did not earn being blessed that he would have a great number of offspring, or that the promised Messiah would come from him.

Abraham was basically a pagan living off the Land. God graciously picked him. The Bible says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Let's say Abraham was having money directly deposited into his account at the first federal Hebrew Bank. He had to make payments on his new two story hut of 400 sheckels a month. This money was also directly withdrawn from his account. Sadly after working hard all month he only had five sheckels in his account. God stepped in, as a gift and put a thousand dollars in just to be safe. Therefore God saved him from being bankrupt.

But we all know it is not about money, it is about saving our souls. God is crediting all your accounts with salvation. This gift that God gives, the promise of eternal life is a gift that is accepted by faith.

Have you ever noticed it is hard to accept a gift, a true gift that is. If someone has you over for dinner, you are inclined to have them over. If someone does you a favor, you probably promise to do something for them. If you receive a present for Christmas, or your birthday, or Valentine's Day, you generally give that person a present back.

Jesus says that is the way the world shows love. But for us we give gifts expecting nothing in return, just like God does.

Sure God does want us to do good things, but not for his sake, for others and for our own good. God would only ask of us that we would receive his gifts with faith. God doesn't need our filthy rags of good works, they are never going to be enough compensation for what he has done for us.

He sent his Son to suffer and die on the cross. Jesus gave of himself totally for our sake. That is and a tremendous gift, not a paycheck.

You know, I did have one job where I never got paid. I was desperate to get a job and I remembered the good old days of working outside at Dial Tent and Awning. Just about the only thing I thought of was to work on a farm. So I called up one of the local farmers who was short on man power. I remember Farmer Hans. He was a large man, young, trying to make it on his own.

So he hired me and I was supposed to make 20 dollars a day. I remember it was a hot day as we picked huge rocks out of his field. At lunch time he invited me in to have a

awesome home cooked meal. Those were the best pork chops and asparagus I have ever had. We work the rest of the day and then I came home in the evening.

The next day I was hoping to go back to work, but he called me early in the morning and said his tractor was broke. So I waited till next week to see if he would call me to come and work. And that is the end of the story. I never heard from him again. And I never got paid my twenty dollars.

Later on I decided it was worth it, partly because I can just tell the story. But mainly because I got to spend time with Farmer Hans and his family. I got to eat an incredible feast and enjoyed working outside in the field with him. You could say that the food was like a paycheck for working that day. But I don't look at it that way. I believed that day was a gift, a gift worth more than twenty dollars. Amen.