

Getting Out of the ‘Tired’ Business

“Yeah, these will work,” Vern said after a quick inspection. (At least I guess that was his name, or else he was wearing somebody else’s shirt.) He whipped out a crisp ten dollar bill and shoved it at my best friend Ray. “Kid, tell your dad if he’s got any more tires we can re-tread they’re worth five bucks a piece.”

Our mouths flung open and we stood there speechless, watching Vern bounce those two old bald tires off the tailgate and into the shop.

Ray motioned for me to help him push start the pickup and we whisk off into morning traffic. A lesser kid might have been rattled facing rush hour without brakes, but not me. I knew Ray could down-shift like nobody’s business. Shucks, I’d been riding with him in his dad’s company trucks since we were old enough to man a chainsaw. Ray would have no problem passing the driving portion of his test next year when he turned fifteen. It was just the written part that concerned me; and that look he was getting in his eyes.

“Let me guess,” I ventured, “We’re going into the tire business.”

“You got it,” he confirmed, “If that dumb Vern fellow will buy old tires for five bucks a piece, we can’t afford not to!”

Ray’s plan basically consisted of stealing the old tires out by Vern’s dumpster and selling them back to him. It sounded reasonable to me.

First we decided to bump by Ray’s house just long enough to toss that ten at his dad and grab the keys to a bigger truck. Thankfully his dad was too busy rebuilding the stump grinder to notice, and we skedaddled out of there before we even had to pretend to hear his warnings about the faulty clutch.

Stripping gears all the way back to the tire shop, we snuck up behind the dumpster and flung seven and a half old worn out tires into the bed. “That’s got to be at least a hundred bucks right there,” Ray gloated. I didn’t know about his math, but I was starting to catch the vision.

“Why don’t we try some other tire places,” I suggested, “They might all accidentally throw out their old tires.”

Ray nodded and we tore off; daydreaming of immense riches; determined to dive every dumpster in Memphis.

We must’ve been a sight to see pulling up to Vern’s shop that night just before closing. The poor old truck was sagging under the weight of those tightly stacked rubber rejects. Ray and I each wore mask of black sweat and grime, and scarcely had the energy to slide out of the truck. Yet we each figured to soon be the richest kids around.

Vern walked out skeptically and pulled a tire down off the heap. He turned it slowly in his hands. I looked over to see a white streak etched in the night. It was Ray’s big toothy smile. Vern pulled down another tire, then another; then he turned to us solemnly to explain the requirements of a potential re-tread.

That was the day I learned if something sounds too good to be true, Ray probably suggested it. We’d spent the entire day digging for Fool’s Gold, now we would spend most of the night re-depositing it.

I wish I could say at that point I’d grown tired of being ‘tired’, and that I got out of the tire business altogether. Yet, the truth is I went right on bobbing for every carrot the devil dangled in front of me, diving every dumpster, reaching for sandy mirage that popped up before me promising some sort of relief from the emptiness I was experiencing in my heart. I was a grown man before I finally called out for relief. It was Jesus who answered. He must’ve been there waiting the whole time! His love turned out to be the missing piece of my puzzle I’d been searching for.

Nowadays I find myself strongly identifying with the Apostle Paul’s summary of his life. Despite previously being regarded as hugely successful by the world’s standards, Paul declared, (*Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ... Philippians 3:8 NLT.*)

Okay, so I admit, I could’ve never been classified as hugely successful, and the ‘garbage’ reference might be viewed a little more literally in my case, but the sentiments expressed are no less relevant in my heart.

But anyway- I still remember looking over at Ray’s grimy mug just before we pulled up to Vern’s that night. Grinding the brakes to a stop he’d said smugly, “There’s a sucker born every minute.” He sure was right. The good news is, every sucker born can be born again.

-Guy Sheffield 11-09-06