

# **“My Name is John Good, Servant of the Servant”**

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Evenin Folks. I wanna thank ya for coming here tonight. You must be real special people to want to hear someone the likes of me talk to ya.

I was christened some 60 years ago John Good. When ya hear more about me you're gonna think that's real funny that they took me to a church, sprinkled some holy water on me and asked God to make John Good be good. The fact of the matter is, I ain't been very good most of my life and I sure ain't been able to look God straight in the eye and tell Him what a fine upstanding fella I am.

Truth is, it wasn't that long ago I would just have soon robbed fine folks like yourselves as talk to ya. And not that long ago I was fresh out of another stint at Sing Sing prison. Prisons and the streets have pretty well been my home for as long as I can remember.

But I ain't here to talk to ya about my sad life. I want to tell you about what changed John Good into someone who doesn't rob people any more, who thinks about someone beside himself, who can even feel ashamed about the things I did in the past.

Now if you were one of my buddies on the street or in the Pen, you'd say nothin is gonna break John Good. Being kicked out on the streets when I was 10 didn't do it. 20 years in jail couldn't do it. Even being hung up by my thumbs up at Sing Sing didn't do it. They'd say "it'd take a miracle to change John Good." (*thoughtful pause*) Well, ya know, I reckon' it was a miracle that changed John Good. It's that miracle that I got to tell you about.

It's a story about the Servant. I call `Abdu'l-Baha, the Servant. Others called him the Master but I heard him say he didn't much like that name. That what he wanted to be called was the Servant of God. That that was the only thing he ever wanted to be was a Servant. I been disobeying God all my life and I said I was going to stop. So if the Son of the Messenger from God tells me he wants to be called the Servant - that's good enough for me. So I call him Servant. Reckin' what I'm trying to be is a good servant of the Servant.

This miracle started for me back in February of 1912. I was just out of Sing Sing and wandering the streets. It was blowing a snow storm that night so me and the other guys had all headed to the Bowery Mission to get some grub and get warm. This night this fine society lady, Miss Juliet Thompson, came to talk to us along with this gentle-man, a Dr. Hallimond. She wasn't the first "goodie two shoes" we called them to come to the Bowery Mission to try to give us religion so, we thought we'd give her a listen and maybe get a few laughs out of it.

But she didn't say anything I was expectin. Miss Juliet Thompson said that a special man from the Holy Land was coming to New York. She said he had spent 40 years of his life in jail. That got our attention - lots of us knew about jail and I ain't never met anyone who spent more time in jail than me. She said somethin else. That this man had come out of prison full of love for the whole world. That really got our attention. Most of us had come out of jail full of hate for the whole world. So, when she asked us to vote if we wanted to have him come to talk to us, all 300 of us stood up to show we voted "Yes". Even Hannegan, who could barely stand up most of the time from boozing, jumped right up.

I don't know what it was but I kept my nose clean till April and on the 19th I made sure I was first in line when they opened the steel doors that night at the Bowery Mission and that I had a good seat at the tables where I could see this Holy man - this man who could come out of prison loving the world.

After supper there was a big fuss outside with cars driving up. Pretty soon in walks this old man surrounded by a bunch of people the likes we ain't never seen at the

Mission. There is Miss Thompson again. And there was a lady reporter for the *New York Tribune*, Kate Carew, and about five other folks all wearing pillbox-type hats they called a "fez" and lookin like they come from Egypt or Persia or somewhere strange.

They met the Reverend who runs the Mission and then got up on this little stage they set up at one end and where they had put a table and some flowers. Miss Thompson introduced this Holy Man who they call `Abdu'l-Bahá or the Master. He was kinda small and was old - 68, they told me. He had a white beard and white cloak that ran down to the floor.

Then He got up and talked to us. I know he was saying the words in some other language and then one of the men in the fez would say the words in English. I gotta say, though, it was as though he was the only one talking and like he was talkin just to me. I can remember most of what He said as though it was yesterday:

"TONIGHT I am very happy, for I have come here to meet my friends. I consider you my relatives, my companions; and I am your comrade.

"You must be thankful to God that you are poor, for Jesus Christ has said, "Blessed are the poor." He never said, "Blessed are the rich." . . . Jesus Himself was poor. . . . When He appeared, it was the poor who first accepted Him. Therefore, you are the disciples of Jesus Christ; you are His comrades, for He outwardly was poor, not rich.

". . . there is no doubt that the divine compassion is bestowed upon the poor. Jesus Christ said so; Baha'u'llah said so. While Baha'u'llah was in Baghdad, still in possession of great wealth, He left all He had and went alone from the city, living two years among the poor. They were His comrades. He ate with them, slept with them and gloried in being one of them. He chose for one of His names the title of The Poor One and often in His Writings refers to Himself as Darvish, which in Persian means Poor; and of this title He was very proud. He admonished all that we must be the servants of the poor, helpers of the poor, remember the sorrows of the poor, associate with them; for thereby we may inherit the Kingdom of heaven...

"Jesus was a poor man. One night when He was out in the fields, the rain began to fall. He had no place to go for shelter so He lifted His eyes toward heaven, saying, "O Father! For the birds of the air Thou hast created nests, for the sheep a fold, for the animals dens, for the fish places of refuge, but for Me Thou hast provided no shelter. There is no place where I may lay My head. My bed consists of the cold ground; My lamps at night are the stars, and My food is the grass of the field. Yet who upon earth is richer than I? For the greatest blessing Thou hast not given to the rich and mighty but unto Me, for Thou hast given Me the poor. To me Thou hast granted this blessing. They are Mine. Therefore am I the richest man on earth."

"So, my comrades, you are following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Your lives are similar to His life; your attitude is like unto His; you resemble Him more than the rich do. Therefore, we will thank God that we have been so blessed with real riches. And in conclusion, I ask you to accept 'Abdu'l-Baha as your servant."

Afterward, `Abdu'l-Baha went down past the Tables and stood near the door where we had to leave. As each of us got to him, he shook our hand and looked in our eyes and quiet-like, so no one could see, put a quarter in our hands. Those who were real bad off he gave four or five quarters. For all 300 of us he did this - gave us the price of a bed for the night and a meal we could pay for ourselves.

*Thoughtful pause* I can't tell ya exactly what I felt when the Servant got to me and when he looked in my eyes. It was something I had never felt before. All I can call it is "Love." The warmest, kindest, deepest love, I reckon a man can feel during his time on this earth. Maybe I felt that same Love when they sprinkled that Holy water on me back in church 60 years ago. Maybe they knew somethin when, in God's name, they named me John Good -- servant of the Servant.

I want to thank you for coming here to listen to what an uneducated, crude fella like me has to say. It is real important to me to be able to tell other folks about my miracle. I pray that some of you might be touched by the same miracle.