

The Atheist Wanted the Money

by Walter Lewis Wilson, M.D.

THE PASTOR of a certain church had a strong desire to reach the folks in a densely populated neighborhood for Christ, so he decided to conduct a tent campaign in their midst. The only vacant lot that seemed to be suitable for such a meeting was being used by an automobile company for advertising purposes. Their cars were on display there with a salesman in charge. The pastor sought out the salesman and through him obtained the name and address of the owner of the lot. He called at the owner's office to see if it would be possible to rent it for the summer. The owner asked the pastor what he would do with the lot if he rented it. He replied that it would be used for a gospel tent campaign, in order that the friends in that part of the city might hear the gospel and become Christians. The owner, being an atheist, was hostile to the things of God. He grew very angry and said that he had no interest whatsoever in the propagation of Christianity, and that he was altogether antagonistic to such procedure.

The pastor, being a wise servant of God, changed the subject by asking whether the present occupant had a lease on the lot, or whether he was just using it temporarily for display purposes. The owner replied that the lot was not leased and that he was receiving only a nominal rent for its temporary use. The pastor assured him that if he would rent the lot to him, he would fix it up nicely, smooth it down, remove the weeds and make it an attractive place, and in addition, pay the rental in advance. He also suggested to him that a great many people would be attending these services and therefore the value of his lot as an attractive location for business would be greatly enhanced.

Sometimes, and in fact quite often, money will change a man's mind. By this time, the owner was not quite so antagonistic and was inclined to listen more sympathetically to the pastor's plea. He invited him into his office to talk it over, and asked what kind of a proposition he wished to make for the use of the lot. "Of course," he said, "you know I will come in for quite a bit of criticism for letting my lot out for church meetings. My friends know my attitude, and they certainly understand that I have no use for this sort of thing." After some bargaining, they agreed upon a price and the date was set on which the present occupant would vacate and the lot could be prepared for the tent.

A force of men from the church made everything ready, erected the

tent, had wires for the lights put in place and the meetings began. After a few weeks, it was my privilege to be the speaker in this tent. The pastor informed me of the hostile attitude of the owner, but said that he had seen him standing out on the sidewalk at various times listening to the music, and for a little while to the message. He suggested that we join in prayer for God to reach his heart and make him a trophy of His grace. Of course, I was glad to do this, and together we looked to the Holy Spirit to make the message effective in his soul.

One night, at the close of the service, a man came to me, shook hands, and said rather casually, "I just wanted to tell you that I appreciated your message tonight; I did not get all of it, but what I heard was excellent, entertaining and instructive; I appreciated it." Having said this, he left abruptly without speaking to anyone else. The pastor did not see him as he came to speak to me, so I made no mention of it, thinking it was only a passing greeting.

A few nights later I saw this same man in the audience, near the outer edge of the tent, and felt happy to think that he had been again attracted to the meeting. I did not know who he was or what was going on in his heart, but I just brought him before the Lord in quiet prayer and asked for a blessing on his soul. When the meeting closed, he slipped away without speaking to me. I found out later that he was the owner of the lot—the atheist.

The last night of the meeting came. The subject for the message was "God Accepts Men's Decisions." There was such a crowd in the tent and so many were standing around on the outside, that I was unable to see the atheist. I felt in my heart that he must be somewhere near by, listening, and so the pastor and I prayed again for his conversion. In the message I mentioned that if men definitely decide to go along without God, then God will bind them to that decision. If men prefer the reasons and arguments of human minds rather than the revelation of God's Word, then God will bind them to it. If men prefer to live in sin rather than be made righteous, then God will force them to continue in that path throughout eternity.

The Spirit of God was making the message effectual. There was liberty in speaking and the people listened most attentively. My friend was nowhere to be seen, but I hoped that he was hidden somewhere in the crowd and was listening to this message. I made an appeal for those who would like to be saved to come forward and enter a little room that had been curtained off in one corner at the front of the tent. To my joy and surprise, the first one to make his way to the platform was the

atheist. He walked right up the center aisle with a boldness and firmness that indicated clearly his intention and desire. I stepped down from the platform to meet him and said, "I am delighted to see you. I do trust that you have come this evening to accept the Saviour. He will accept you when you accept Him. The moment you trust your soul to Him, you are His child and all His saving work at Calvary is placed to your credit."

He smiled at me, pressed my hand firmly and said, "I trusted Him while you were preaching. I saw how foolish I have been to set my opinion up against God's Word. I realize that my atheism has gotten me nowhere and has brought me no blessing whatever. Christ has what I want and tonight I have made Him my own. I certainly never thought that the tent meetings would do this to me. What a blessing it was to me that the pastor came to my office and asked for the lot!"

The desire for money was used of God to bring him in touch with the gospel and with Christ.

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