

"I Am the Preacher's Wife"

by Walter Lewis Wilson, M.D.

FOUR CHURCHES in a Southern city joined in union services which began on Saturday night and closed on Sunday night. I gave four addresses—one in each of the cooperating churches. The closing service was held in the largest of the four buildings. The other churches dismissed their own meetings in order that all might attend in this one great effort. The church was crowded. The Sunday-school rooms had been thrown open into the auditorium and they, too, were crowded.

In one of the most distant Sunday-school rooms, an elderly lady was sitting near the wall with a little baby boy in her lap. She did not look up very much during the service, but kept her head bowed as though she was watching her little grandson. Only once in a while did she seem to show any interest in my message. She would look up for a brief moment and then drop her head, so that I could not see her face. She wore a hat with a rather broad brim and this served as a screen over her face. It did not occur to me that she was trying to hide her face from me, or from the audience. I really thought that she was not very much interested in my message, and was somewhat bored because she had to stay there and take care of the baby.

The subject of the message that evening was "The Gift and the Giver." I sought to bring to the attention of my audience that most so-called Christians are more interested in what they can get from God than they are in receiving and knowing God for themselves. God's gifts of peace and prosperity, of comfort and quiet, of happiness and health, are far more in demand than the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself to the soul and the heart. In quoting John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," I mentioned that it was a Person that God gave, that it is a Person that we need, and it is a Person that we accept by faith. I read to them Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The best gifts come after we receive the Giver. God does not give His gifts of life, peace, forgiveness, and salvation until we have received His unspeakable Gift. Eternal life is in the risen Christ and only those who receive Him receive this gift.

The lady showed some interest in a few of these thoughts. She glanced

up for a moment as though she desired to listen more closely, but when I looked toward her, she lowered her head quickly. I did hope that my illustrations and explanations would arouse some interest in this one who seemed to have such an indifferent spirit. How easy it is for us to misjudge people by their actions! It is always well to understand thoroughly before arriving at any conclusion.

When the service had closed I forgot about the lady, because I thought that she would make her way out quickly, and would be happy to get away from a situation which seemed to be so unpleasant. We who stand on a platform are not surprised when we see folks hurrying out the door at the close of a meeting, because in almost every service there are those who are not interested, and who hold opinions that are quite contrary to those expressed by the speaker.

A number of people came forward to speak with me, some out of curiosity and some with a real heart-burden. When most of the friends had gone, one of the pastors, an elderly gentleman, came to me and said, "My wife would like to speak with you after the others have gone. She is the elderly lady sitting over in the Sunday-school room with her little grandson in her lap." What a surprise this was to me! I had not noticed that she remained behind, for she was hidden by the crowd as they stood. Of course, I did not know she was a pastor's wife, nor did I have the least idea that she was interested enough to want to see me. I said to the pastor, "It will be a pleasure, indeed, to talk with her, and you may tell her that as soon as the crowd has gone I will come to where she is sitting." He went away to tell her, while I conversed with those who remained.

After they had gone, I went to this friend and sat down beside her. I noticed that her face was red with weeping, and that she was quite agitated in her spirit. In order to make her feel at ease, I said, "I noticed you during the service and thought that you were not interested. I did see you look up a number of times, but it seemed to me you had only a passing interest. I thought you were watching the child and were just waiting until you could leave the room and get away from being bored."

She replied with some hesitation, "I was trying to hide my tears, Doctor; I did not want you to know the turmoil that was going on in my heart, and I did not want the folks around me to see that I was weeping. I have been going through a terrible struggle today. Your message this morning convinced me that I should be honest, even if I am the preacher's wife."

This statement revealed to me that there was some deep trouble in this woman's life that probably no one knew about. The very fact that she was hiding her feelings so carefully showed that there was a battle which I needed to know about. I said to her, "Do tell me what this burden is. Have you lost someone by death, or is there a financial difficulty? I notice you are holding your grandson. Is the mother not well, or is there trouble in the home? Feel free, my sister, to tell me what is on your heart. I shall treat it confidentially and will be glad to help you in every way that I can."

She looked around the room to see that no one was near enough to hear her story, and then she began to tell me of her experience. "I am the wife of the pastor of the church where you preached this morning. You were speaking about peace. I was especially interested in what you said about having peace with God, because the sins are gone. I have never had that peace. I am sixty-two years old and will soon be at the end of my journey, and it is terrible to think, as I look back, that although I am the preacher's wife I have never had peace with God."

It is always well, when it is possible, to inquire into one's history, and find out how and when the present situation began to exist; so I said to her, "Please tell me about your early life. Did you never profess to be saved? How did you happen to marry this preacher without being a Christian?"

She said, "I will be glad to tell you the story, because I want help and I want it tonight. I must not continue in this hypocrisy any longer. It is too dangerous."

She related the following story: "I was a girl of twenty when my husband, who was then a young, unmarried preacher, came to our town to hold some meetings. I was in the church, but I realized that I did not have salvation. The young preacher was very attractive and we fell in love with each other. After a few months, during which he held services elsewhere, he returned to our little city and asked me to marry him. I said to him, 'How could we get along together when I'm not saved? I could not help you in your ministry and I would only be a hypocrite, pretending to be a Christian.' He reasoned with me that if I would marry him I would be in and around the church constantly, would be hearing sermons, and therefore would soon become a Christian. I listened to him, because I loved him, and we were married. Of course, after we were married, I had to take the place of being a Christian and I found it easy to do. Because I was the preacher's wife, no one ever asked me if I were a Christian. I was elected to places of responsibility in the various churches where we served. I was called

upon to pray and to lead the prayer meeting. Of course, I never could bring myself to the ordeal of going forward in a service and confessing my need of the Saviour, because I was the preacher's wife. Now, here I am sixty-two years old. For forty-two years I have kept up this hypocrisy, and I will do so no longer. Tell me how to be saved."

This was a rather difficult case, because this woman had listened to sermons for many years. She had heard excellent men of God. She knew the Bible story well. She knew the gospel. She knew about the person and work of Christ. What should I say to her? She saw that I was hesitating and so she remarked, "I know what is going through your mind. You are wondering what to say to one who has been so prominent in Christian work and has read the Bible so many years. I want you to deal with me as you would deal with any unbeliever. I don't want you to take it for granted that I know one thing about God, the gospel, or the Bible. Start in at the beginning of the story and as you tell it, I will find where I have missed out."

My mind was quite relieved by this suggestion, and so I began to show her why she was lost and why she needed the Saviour. I showed her the fallacy of trying to be saved by good works and the sufficiency of the saving work of Christ. I brought before her God's gift of the Saviour and the blessed results that follow the reception of that Saviour. She listened intently and did not interrupt me at any point. Fortunately, the baby was asleep and did not disturb. The husband saw the situation and very wisely kept others from bothering us. As she nodded her head from time to time, I gathered that she understood the points I was making, and that the Holy Spirit was dispelling the doubts and removing the shadows.

Finally, we turned to John 1:12 and read, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." I asked her if she had ever done this and she replied at once, "That is where I have missed salvation! I can see clearly my trouble. I have been content to know about Christ and to be considered as a Christian, because of my good life, but I have never really taken Christ." At this point she bowed her head again, but this time it was in the presence of her Lord. She said to Him, "Lord Jesus, I have lived too long without You. Tonight I am taking You for myself. Thank You so much for Your patience through these years. I am so glad You did not take me away in Your wrath. I trust You fully tonight."

The blessed transaction had taken place. She rose with the baby in her

arms, went over to her husband and said, "Dear, I have found Christ tonight. My forty-two years of being a hypocrite are over. Now I can be of some real help to you. Tonight I have peace in my heart for the first time in my life."

How kind God is to bear with us through the years to show His mercy and grace, and to forgive!

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