

## The Loss and Gain of a Jeweler

by Walter L. Wilson, M.D.

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Wilbur was an ambitious young man, about twenty-two years of age. He worked in a jewelry store, and that business became so attractive to him that he decided to spend his entire time in learning the work, preparatory to building up a business of his own. He frequently was a guest in our home and found great pleasure in telling us of the progress he was making, learning the ins and outs of the jewelry business. He was delighted with the study of jewels, and had taken a course of study in the making and repairing of watches and clocks. Though we often spoke to him about spiritual matters, he showed quite plainly that he had no interest in such things.

One evening, during our visit together, I asked him to tell me his own thought concerning his relationship to God and his attitude toward the Lord Jesus. He replied that he took no interest at all in such matters, but was devoting his entire attention to the development of his jewelry business. He had obtained a small shop and was busy repairing watches, resetting stones, and doing such work as he was able to obtain. "I expect to attend diligently to my business day and night," he said, "and when I have made fifty thousand dollars in the clear, then I will feel that I can settle down and think about religious matters, if I am so inclined. I do not wish to be bothered at all with anything pertaining to Christianity until I have made my goal, fifty thousand dollars."

We did not see each other very often after this. Wilbur remained away from my home in order to avoid being questioned about the progress he was making. We took him often to the Lord in prayer and looked to the Holy Spirit to deal with him in His own matchless way. His business prospered. He was a good workman, was quite attentive to the desires of his customers, and gradually built up a splendid trade. He saved his money, bought and furnished a beautiful little home just outside the city limits, and then took his young bride to their delightful cottage where he intended to enjoy a life of ease and comfort after making his fortune.

Occasionally, I would meet Wilbur on the street and would speak

to him about whether his ambitions were being realized and whether the fifty thousand dollar goal was in sight. Each time the reply was enthusiastically in the affirmative. He told me of the stone cottage, of the beautiful furnishings, of the baby-grand piano. He also mentioned about the yard which he had decorated so beautifully with shrubbery, evergreens and winding walks. A lily-pond was there, as well as a fish-pond. A rock-garden graced the premises also. The garage, built of native stone, was surrounded by a trellis covered with vines. His heart was happy in this beautiful little home.

As the profits increased, Wilbur used much of them for the building up of a greater business. More stock was needed, larger quarters were required, more overhead expense developed. Not much was laid away in a savings account, nor for a retirement fund. He was using up or investing as rapidly as the profits were made.

One evening, Wilbur and his wife remained down town for their dinner and then went to the theatre for recreation. The show did not close until a late hour, and it was a much later hour when they arrived at the site of their little home about a mile outside the city limits. To their great horror and astonishment they found the place in ruins. What had once been their love-nest was now a pile of ashes. A fire had broken out from some unknown source, and because the city water was not available, the neighbors were unable to extinguish the flames, and this little palace of hopes and dreams perished. Wilbur and his companion were heart-broken. The result of their labors and toil was undone in an hour or two. The destruction was complete, everything burned.

Wilbur sought to comfort his wife with the thought that the place was fully covered by insurance, and an adjustment would be quickly made. They returned to the city and found refuge in the home of some relatives, who gave them a cordial welcome until they could plan for the future. The next morning, Wilbur went to the bank to take out his fire insurance policies and apply for payment. As he examined them, he was shocked to find that every policy had expired just a few weeks before the fire. The policies on the building as well as those on the furniture were of no value. All was lost. Somebody had failed. In some manner, the insurance companies had neglected to notify him of the expiration date. He had failed to note it on his calendar. His

heart was broken. He returned to his wife with a heavy heart to impart to her the tragic news.

Wilbur was still ambitious, and his friends continued to pray. Again I looked to the Holy Spirit to give me a wise word, spoken in kindness, in order that the wound might not be deepened, but rather that the heart might be softened toward the Lord. How wise the Spirit is in all His dealings! How gently and yet how firmly He presses home upon the heart the verities of eternity! He knows the sorrows that await the lost. He knows how black is that darkness into which souls will be cast who reject the Light of the world. He was dealing with Wilbur in ways that we had never suspected. Wilbur was still ambitious. He would return to his work with a new vigor. His loss was great, but he would recuperate these losses by a more earnest effort and a more judicious use of his remaining assets. Night and day he bent over his desk at his work.

A few months after the fire, as Wilbur was working over his repair desk, a cough developed. Little by little it increased in severity, but received only passing attention from him. He resorted to cough drops, cough medicine, and agents which were advertised for the relief of cough, but none of these seemed to help. He began to lose the spring in his step. A flush appeared in his cheeks; the nights were restless. After much persuasion, he accompanied his wife to see a physician of note in the city. A careful examination and diagnosis disclosed the development of tuberculosis. The doctor urged him to leave the desk, to quit his work, and to go at once to a climate more conducive to the building up of his health.

Wilbur's competitors had been quite active, and he realized that his trade was not increasing to any great extent; certainly he was losing some of his best customers. The diagnosis of his case discouraged him greatly. The old wound caused by the fire was reopened, and discouragement filled his soul. He did not know the Lord of glory. He could not pour out his heart to that sympathizing Shepherd. He had never made the Rock of Ages his refuge. He felt like a ship in a storm on the high seas with the rudder gone, the mast broken, and the cabins wrecked. He felt adrift in his helplessness and life seemed hopeless.

Those of us who had been praying for him felt that the Lord was

dealing kindly with his soul in wrecking his hopes and permitting his body to be afflicted. Even though Wilbur had suffered all this loss and the future was so dark, still he did not turn his heart to seek God, nor did he renounce his former purpose to seek the Lord only after he had obtained fifty thousand dollars.

The doctor's instructions were so earnest and the case seemed so desperate, that Wilbur decided to abide by the advice of his physician, and at once made provision for the disposal of his affairs. He sold the jewelry store for a comparatively small amount, most of which had to be utilized to pay off his obligations. Only a small sum of money remained with which to take his journey westward, and this would soon be consumed in living expenses, absorbed in doctor's bills and traveling expenses.

Wilbur had a godly mother who had been praying much for her ambitious boy, pleading with God for his salvation, and asking her Lord to do anything at all that would result in Wilbur's conversion. Her home was in the West, and Wilbur decided to stop a few days to see the mother before continuing toward his destination. He arrived at the old homestead in the evening and poured out his heart to that mother who had loved him so faithfully and prayed for him so believingly. Mother was wise. She did not press the gospel upon her boy, for she saw he was thinking, knew his heart was broken, and she felt his sorrow keenly.

The following morning, however, as they sat at the breakfast table, his mother said to him: "Wilbur, did you ever listen to Dr. Wilson give his morning Bible lesson over the radio?"

"Yes, mother," he replied, "he is a friend of mine. For many years we have known each other and he has often spoken to me about the Lord, although I have never given him any encouragement." As he was talking, the mother turned on the radio just in time for the Bible lesson. The station was WDAF of the *Kansas City Star*, and the voice was so clear that Wilbur was a bit startled. It seemed as though his friend was in the room with him.

The subject of the lesson which I gave that morning over the air was "Three Alabaster Boxes." I said, in substance: "The first one

is described in Luke 7:37-38. A heart-broken woman, seared by sin, brought her alabaster box of precious ointment and broke it at the feet of Jesus, a token of her love, a proof of her trust. I am told that the alabaster box in the orient is the maiden's 'hope-chest.' Some were very cheap ones, filled with a poor grade of perfume. There were other grades much more expensive, in keeping with the station in life of the purchaser and as she was able to buy. There were some very fine ones, made of exquisite alabaster and filled with the most costly perfumes. Our Lord did not tell which kind this woman brought. We do not need to know. Legend has it that the maiden purchased the box in her youth, according to her station in life, and kept the box until she should find the man to whom she could entrust herself and upon whom she could lavish her affections. Whenever she found the man of her choice and he gave the opportunity, she would break the box at his feet. This sealed her vow of devotion, and proclaimed to him and to others that he had won her heart. The woman pictured in Luke had never yet found the man who fulfilled her requirements. But one day she heard Jesus and saw in Him the fulfillment of all the craving of her heart. She came to Him in her need; she knelt at His feet; she wept, and washed His feet with her tears. She wiped them with the hairs of her head. She broke the box; she left her heart at His feet. His response was — 'Thy sins are forgiven ... Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.'

"The second box was that beautiful alabaster one which Mary brought in John 12:3. This gracious gift of sweetest perfume from Mary was a token of her gratitude, the thanksgiving of her heart, because Lazarus had been given back to her and was now seated at the table with her. She, too, was a worshipper at Jesus' feet. She was not seeking forgiveness, that blessing had been granted at some previous time. Hers was a ministry of adoration, with reverence and thanksgiving. Christ had broken the bands of death and dried her tears. Christ had removed her sorrow and replaced it with a song. Christ had dispelled the darkness, substituting the sunshine. Christ had turned defeat into victory. No wonder she loved Him. No marvel that she had taken her savings, invested it in this lovely box of fragrant perfume, and then had broken it at the feet of the only man who had filled her heart with love, peace, and adoration. She, too, left her heart at Jesus' feet.

"The third alabaster box is described in Mark 14:3. On this occasion, a nameless woman, two days before the crucifixion, brought her 'hope-chest' and left it with Jesus. She, too, broke that box, for her quest was at an end. She had found the One who filled her soul — the Lover sent from Heaven who would both save and satisfy. Her ointment was placed upon His head. Hers was an offering of trust. It was against the day of His burying that she anointed His precious body. She believed in Him, she showed her confidence in Him, she gave to Him her best. Her heart had found rest in kneeling at Jesus' feet. Henceforth, her life would be devoted to His glory. She would make known the fame of His love and grace wherever she went."

This was the substance of the message which came over the air into that humble cottage in western Kansas where Wilbur sat with his mother listening to the words of life. When the closing prayer was finished, Wilbur arose quietly from the table and went to his bedroom. Not a word was spoken. The mother was watching the face of her boy as he had listened intently to the message. It was a holy time and a sacred scene. God was working in that heart. As he quietly closed the door of his room, the mother quickly went to her knees to plead for the one she loved so dearly. She was not in a hurry to leave the sanctuary, but remained there for quite a while pleading with the Saviour to enter that bedroom and to show to Wilbur His wounded hands and His torn feet, proofs of His wonderful love.

Behind that closed door, God was answering the prayers of years. Wilbur was kneeling beside the chair. The eyes of his heart were fixed on the Saviour. He heard the call of Christ: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Life had been cruel to him, ambition had betrayed him, and now, empty-handed and heavy-hearted, he knelt in reverent faith at the feet of Jesus and trusted Him with his soul. The victory was won. Peace ruled on the battlefield of his heart. He had rest. Returning to the dining-room, he saw the mother on her knees and soon he was at her side, while they both wept with joy in the presence of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit had worked. Prayer had been answered.

in the Moody Colportage Library).