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# If Mine Were A Heathen City.



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## If Mine Were A Heathen City.

Text: "*I am debtor.*"—*Romans* 1: 14.

Paul announces his obligations, he proclaims his liabilities, he declares his indebtedness, he tells us what he owes. He is heavily embarrassed. But it is not the fact of debt that distresses him. He is not worried for fear he may be unable to meet his obligations. It is anxiety lest somehow he may shirk payment that stirs him. Having announced the fact that he is in debt, he names his creditors. "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians." How can he owe these people anything? He has never had any financial transactions with them. They do not know him and he does not know them. They have never heard of him and he can refer to them only by their nationality. To people with whom he has had no business dealings and no commercial correspondence and not the remotest personal contact, Paul says, "I am debtor."

Having named his creditors, he tells how he proposes to meet his obligations. "So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel." Paul proposes to pay his debts by preaching the gospel. It is a strange method of debt-paying. It is rather an airy way of facing one's creditors. It is somewhat emotional. It is altogether too sentimental a plan of canceling indebtedness. "Paul, you would better get down to a cash basis." Paul, however, has full confidence in the currency he proposes to use. He is not afraid that it will go to protest. He has no fear that it will be rejected or even questioned. He says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Stranger than the list of creditors and stranger than the proposed method of payment is the ground of obligation,

Paul is in debt because he has been blessed. We regard debt as the sequence of disaster or as the result of limitations. Paul has incurred debt by riches received. He is a debtor to preach the gospel because he has received the gospel. He owes Christ to others because he has Christ himself. He must not be selfish. What Christ is to him, He can and would be to every human life. Paul has no right to sit still and enjoy the blessings of redemption while others are in need of that which he can give.

This is a brand new kind of obligation. It is an unheard of sort of debt. It is the Christian view of privilege. It is this conception of obligation that makes the Christian church a missionary church.

The Christian is debtor to people he has never seen. They do not know him and he does not know them. They have never heard of him and he can refer to them only by their nationality. His creditors are Greeks and Barbarians, people of culture and people without culture, people of China, of India, of Africa, of the islands of the sea, all people of any land who have never heard the gospel and who do not know of Christ.

The only way the Christian can pay his debt is with the gospel. He need not be afraid that it will be rejected. It is what the world most needs. It is the currency with which God meets his obligations to mankind; and if the mighty God could cancel his debt to the human race with the gospel, surely it will pay mine to my fellow man. If it was efficient to make eternal payment of the liabilities of Jehovah, I need not fear it will go to protest when offered in payment of my obligations.

My debt was contracted in the same way as Paul's. I am a Christian. Some one or many made it possible for me to hear the gospel. It was not because I deserved it. I had done nothing to merit such a favor. It is all of grace. I do not

know why I was born in a Christian instead of a pagan or heathen land. I do not know why I was born in a Christian home, with parents who belonged to the church and whose first care was that I should know and love their Saviour. You do not know why that little daughter whom you love better than your life was not born in India, where she might have been a child-widow at the tender age of four years; or in China, where the birth of a daughter is regarded as a calamity. But somehow I know Him, whom to know aright is life eternal. I have a Christian's view of God and man and the world and home and country and heaven, and because I have, I am debtor. Shame on me, if in such a day of grace, I close tightly on what I have received, and doubling down in stolid selfishness, repudiate my debts!

### MINE IS A CHRISTIAN CITY.

Because it is, it is a good city in which to live. The fact that mine is a Christian city helps to make it a profitable city in which to do business. Because it is Christian, it is a good city in which to bring up children, to have friends, to own property, to follow a trade, to practice a profession. It is far from being a perfect city, to be sure. There is much that might be better. But the bad is not because of the city's Christianity. It is in spite of it. The city has social and civic blemishes because it is not as Christian as it might be. It is the Christianity it has that makes it a city where personal liberty is guaranteed, human life held in high esteem, childhood protected, womanhood respected, home honored, wifehood and motherhood revered, and things that are true and beautiful and good celebrated and sought.

Suppose it were not a Christian city. We are so accustomed to it that we are wont to take our Christianity as a matter of course. Suppose mine were a heathen city. All

cities are not Christian. There are heathen cities in the world. What if my city were one of these heathen cities? What changes would take place?

I have never been in a heathen city. I have been in some American cities where Christianity was at low ebb, and where the seething tide of wanton vice and immorality reigned. I have been through certain neglected sections of great American cities where the sodden wretchedness of human misery rotted in damp of sin whose ignorance bordered on the night of heathenism. But I have never been in a city where heathenism reigned. I cannot answer the question as well as some missionary who has seen a heathen city; and seen it not as the passing tourist who sees only its strange shows and curious sights, but who has gone down into its awful decay and breathed its moral stench and come into living contact with its blank, black despair. While I cannot answer the question as well as such a missionary I can at least give a partial answer, and name some of the things that must go with the loss of our Christianity.

### IF MINE WERE A HEATHEN CITY

The first to go would be the churches. We should have to tear down every Christian church in the city, and close every Sunday school and wipe out every mission. We should have to raze the Young Men's Christian Association. If the city were heathen, it would stop the mouth of every preacher and abolish Sunday as a day of worship and as a day of rest. This is the first and most evident change to take place. The churches and all that they stand for must go. This is not all.

We must close the public schools. There are no public schools like ours in a heathen city, except in Japan, whose school system was taken from our own. One of our missionary agencies is the day school. The public schools are not free of

faults. It is an easy achievement to criticise them, but they are vastly better than the conditions they supplanted, and they are immeasurably better than no schools. The Episcopal preacher who declared the public schools are turning out a generation of "lusty young pagans" said what very few of us believe and what the facts do not warrant. The public school system is an indirect product of Christianity. We should lose it if the city were heathen.

Then the hospitals would go. They do not exist in heathen lands, save as they have been introduced by Christianity. The hospital is one of the missionary enterprises of the church. In India, Dr. Scudder, in charge of a hospital to which thousands come to be healed, is doing three men's work. If the city were heathen, we must close all public and private hospitals, hospitals for incurables, for women and children, for the crippled, for contagious diseases, and all those institutions which exist for the relief of human pain and the care and cure of human sicknesses. We must give up the medical profession as we have it now. Then if a man should fall on the streets, there would be no ambulance to carry him and no cot to receive him. Should your child fall ill, there would be no physician to come with intelligent skill and healing remedies, but instead a creature, with wild incantations, to add plague and torture to the little sufferer.

Next to go would be the orphan asylums and homes for the aged and friendless, and institutions for the care of defectives and afflicted. We should have to close the day nurseries and tear down the homes for the insane, where those who have lost their reason find a refuge. All of these aged and helpless people and these defenseless children must be turned out in the storm and left on the streets should the city become heathen.

The next to go would be our organized charities, for there is no organized charity in a heathen city. We should have to

relinquish Associated Charities with their sane and unselfish work, the Charitable Societies and their splendid beneficence; the Industrial Homes and Rescue Missions, where the man out of work and the prisoner fresh from serving his sentence may find a helping hand; the Florence Crittenton Homes where the sinning and outcast may step through a door of hope; and all those other agencies in a Christian city by which the needy and the worthless are lifted to self-help and set on the road to industry and respectability must cease.

If the city were heathen, we should lose the city government under which we live. It is frequently the ground of just complaint because of existing abuses, but compared with what passes for government in a heathen city it is as day to dark. We denounce the system of "graft" which obtains to a greater or less extent in many American cities, but the "graft" we groan over is a virtue compared with the shameless extortions and brazen injustices practiced by the heathen officials of a Chinese city. Civilization with its free institutions, its sense of justice, its respect for law and order is the outcome of Christianity. With an oriental miscalled court of justice and its reign of terror instead of what we have, property values would tumble, trade would suffer irreparable loss and conditions of living would become far harder.

This is not all that would happen were the city to become heathen. There are invisible values, more precious even than those I have mentioned, we should lose. It would take from us our immortal hope and faith in Christ, our Christian experience with all its peace and fortitude. If ours were a heathen city, we should be heathen!

Recently I was shown two photographs. The first was of a man suffering from club foot. He was terribly deformed and badly crippled. His deformity was a handicap that made existence hard and work difficult. The second was of the same man, taken three months later, after he had been healed by a

Christian surgeon. The deformity was gone. The man stood square and flat-footed on two good feet, and was ready to measure equal with his fellows in the race of life.

That kind of relief is a great boon, and that is a part of the work of missions. Christianity has a gospel for the body. But there is a blessing infinitely more precious. It also takes the deformity out of the soul. It was spiritual as well as physical hurts the prophet had in mind when he proclaimed the blessings of the gospel age and cried, "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

All this would go were the city heathen. You could not say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." You could not pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven." You could not teach the children, "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son."

There is one thing more that would happen should the city become heathen. We should have to go to the cemeteries and erase every inscription of hope from the memorial stones over the resting places of our beloved dead. No minister would stand by our side as the clods fall on the confined dust and say, "But we look for the general resurrection and the life of the world to come." There would be no word of hope and no vision of home. No invisible but real Friend would stand near us in our sorrow and whisper to listening faith, "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions." We, and our city, and our dead should all be heathen.

These are some of the things that must take place. It is no fancy sketch. The best must go. Who would care to remain in a city so spoiled? You are saying that life would be intolerable with all these gone. So it would for those who have once tasted the gospel. It is Christianity that makes mine a good city in which to live. And my city is Christian, because in the march of events there were men and women

who felt as Paul did and who said: "We are debtors." "We have received and we must give." It will be kept Christian only by such people. And the cities which are now heathen will become Christian only as those who have heard of Christ recognize their obligation and pay their debts.

## THE MISSIONARY MOTIVE.

This is the reigning missionary motive—"I am debtor." No one who dwells in a Christian city and is a beneficiary of Christian civilization, whether he believe in the personal Christ or not, can repudiate this obligation, without condemning himself at the bar of God and mankind.

A man says to me, "I do not believe in Foreign Missions." I ask him, "Then what do you believe in? If you do not believe in Foreign Missions, you do not believe in Christianity, you do not believe in humanity, you do not believe in philanthropy, you do not believe in charity, you do not believe in education, you do not believe in character, you do not believe in fraternity. What do you believe in? If you do not believe in Foreign Missions, you do not believe in anything worth believing in." The missionary enterprise is the enterprise of mankind.

What is needed is for this conviction of debt to the heathen to take possession of the Church. It is not merely the sending out of a few more missionaries. We need to send them and many more. It is not merely the giving of a few more dollars. We need to give thousands where we are giving hundreds. But in addition to all else there is needed the moving, steady, resistless, cumulative momentum of the conviction that every Christian is a debtor and that he can cancel his debt only with the gospel. There need be no fear that the church may do too much for this cause. Someone asked Phillips Brooks what he would do were he called to take charge of a church heavily in-

volved in debt, greatly discouraged and rapidly disintegrating. He replied: "The first thing I should do would be to take up a collection for Foreign Missions." The church need not be afraid it will bankrupt itself in paying its debt to the heathen.

## A MISSIONARY HERO.

Some sixteen years ago, on the threshold of my ministry, I became pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, Va. On the first Sunday of the New Year, January 1st, 1888, I received into the church a lad of eleven years of age named Frank Slaymaker. He was the first to unite with the church on profession of faith during my ministry in Alexandria. The incident was my introduction to one of the most devotedly Christian families in the parish. He had a brother Henry, two years his senior, who was already in the church, and a sister a few years older still. These three with their widowed mother made the household. When Mrs. Slaymaker gave her children to the church she did so without reservation. The boys developed in their Christian characters and were active in Christian work. Henry was elected an elder on reaching young manhood.

One of the most interesting and important missions in Africa is the Congo Mission of the Southern Presbyterian Church, with a church organization at Luebo, 1,000 miles from the coast, numbering over 2,000 members. It has also been the costliest mission of the church both in money and workers. For two years the Southern Church had been praying for a business manager for this mission. Henry Slaymaker, with a bright business career before him at home, offered himself and was accepted. It was deemed best that he should be sent out as an ordained minister. He was examined and ordained an "extraordinary case." He had never attended a theological seminary, but his examination was so satisfactory

that a member of the Presbytery declared "his examination showed his mother to be a better teacher than a theological seminary."

Three months ago young Slaymaker sailed for the mission field. He had almost reached the end of the long journey when the mission steamer Lapsley, in ascending the Congo, capsized and Henry Slaymaker and twenty-three natives were drowned.

Just as he was reaching the field where he was so sorely needed and for which he was so peculiarly fitted, he was taken. We cannot understand such a loss. Is it a loss? No, it is a glorious investment. Since Christ laid down his life for the world's redemption no life similarly consecrated is lost, whether death come soon or late.

The Sunday following the fatal accident, in his home church in Alexandria, there was held a Memorial Service of Henry Slaymaker, and at this service they actually gathered a memorial offering to raise the Lapsley and prosecute the work. It is such splendid faith as this that will conquer the world.

In a letter received from one of the Secretaries of the Church, he says: "There must be no turning back now. On to Luebo must be our cry!"

Splendid heroism! May the devotion of this young martyr fire our faith. Christ gave his life. What am I giving? It is the cause to which I can never give too much, and in which what I do never can be lost.

*I am debtor!* God help me to pay my debts!

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