

## Chapter 20

# An Unwitting Agent

The injustices of the world and what some of us are prone to call Fate often times leave us bewildered. Many times we wonder at the way things happen - things that seem unfair and underserved. Being human, we view these matters only from one point of view - our own. We fail to allow for or understand the Great Overall Plan which must encompass the entire universe and everyone who exists in it. However, the words of the Scripture, "All things work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose"<sup>10</sup> have been proved true over and over again in the lives of those who are "the called."

In the course of my life, I had many proofs of God's watchfulness and faithfulness. When I would forget in the eager anxiousness of the moment's need, I would remember the countless times He had proved His all-seeing care. And many times, after God had again shown Himself strong and faithful in the matter of the automobile accident, I was strengthened in faith, knowing I could trust God in all the disappointments and vicissitudes of life. I had been shown beyond doubt that I had found a friend who would never leave or forsake me but had always and would always be faithful. I thank God for all the hard places along the way, places that seemed to lead toward a dead end with no visible way out, because I have always found Him to be "the Way." Over and over again, I came to understand the truth of His promise,

"With every temptation, I make with it a way of  
escape that ye may be able to bear it." (*1 Cor. 10:13*)

The work of the little mission that we called the Bethesda Missionary Tabernacle grew steadily in spirituality and in numbers. It prospered, not in worldly gain, but in souls eager for God's grace and in a growing knowledge of Him. He was making Himself very real and precious to all of us who were bent on doing His bidding. Those of us

---

<sup>10</sup> Rom. 8:28

who had founded the work on the merest shoestring, but with the utmost confidence in His faith and help, were gratified to see there were many others who felt the need that we had - to know God in a very personal sense and to identify our daily lives with Him and His works. The lack of elaborate facilities did not deter us from offering our minds and hearts to Him with the utmost fullness and with unrestricted devotion.

\* \* \*

A missionary woman from China visited our church. She had begun her work in a strange and far-off land with no more resources than we had. She told how God had led her and her associates along the faith line, even as ourselves. She related a story of how when they had no finances to erect a building of worship, God had miraculously provided them with funds to raise up a place of worship, devotion, and study. Even though we had experienced a similar miracle ourselves, to hear of this experience on the other side of the world seemed fresh and new to me. I thought it was the most wonderful testimony of God's faithfulness I had ever heard.

At this time we had been growing in such great numbers that already our small quarters were beginning to be insufficient for our needs. The missionary's story brought to our minds again the inescapable fact that we would soon need a new and larger building to carry on the work. In the neighborhood where God had placed us, there was no available space for expansion. There wasn't even another building we could rent or buy.

Our small income, akin to the "loaves and fishes," had somehow been adequate to take care of our simple needs, and through judicious management and self-denial, we had been able to keep our bills paid. We never had anything left over that would even resemble something with which to start a building fund. Yet our need for more room was growing weekly with the addition of more members and growing activities in God's name.

Because of the missionary's testimony, faith and hope arose in my own heart, and I asked God to do something for us. As always, He heard my prayer. Sometime later, someone mentioned to me that there was a portable church building for sale in a lumberyard on the west side of the city. Since there was no other available building in our present

neighborhood, you may imagine that this news was most interesting to us.

Upon investigation, we found that this building was a little white portable church building which had been taken in trade by the lumber yard from a Lutheran congregation. They had used it as temporary quarters while they built a beautiful permanent edifice. Upon inspecting it, we found that this little white church would be ideal for our purposes.

We asked the price. I don't know what we expected, but we were thunderstruck when we were told that it would be \$850. Not that this was exorbitant, but the truth was that we did not possess 850 cents. Of course, to us they might just as well been asking \$ 850,000. It was that far removed from our resources.

Remembering that the little building which we were then occupying seemed just as impossible to come by when we first inquired the terms for its rental, I went before the Lord in prayer. I asked Him how I would go about purchasing this building without funds. I definitely felt this building was a part of us. It seemed so right, not only in size but in character, design, and in the way the news of its existence had come to us, but also in the seeming remoteness of its availability. I felt it was in God's will that we should have it.

On the first day that I prayed for this intention, I felt I had definitely gotten through to God. He put before my mind's eye a certain red-haired business man of our community. I was puzzled and confused at this, for this man was not at all sympathetic to our work. So naturally I concluded that it was not the Lord who was directing my mind to this man. Therefore, I gave up praying for that day, feeling that I must have in some way become diverted.

On the following day, I went again before the Lord in prayer and asked Him what to do. Again this red-haired business man was placed before me as the means to our need. It seemed all that long day of prayer, every time I felt I had reached God, the awareness of this man would block my praying. So, reluctantly I again gave up my devotions.

The third day, I had begun to feel a great anxiousness and apprehension of the passing of time. I knew I must soon contact God and somehow receive a definite answer. The building could not be held much longer. No doubt it would soon be sold to someone else who had the ready cash available. So again, I repaired to my prayer closet. After some time, when I felt I had gotten through to God, there again was the red-haired man who was known in the community as Mr. Ed.

This time, in spite of myself, and in spite of the unlikelihood of this man being receptive to our need, I began to feel it must indeed be the Lord who was showing the way - though how this could be, I could not conceive. But like Esther of old, I repeated to myself, "I will go. If I perish, I perish."

So I prepared myself and went to Mr. Ed's hardware store. In a state of turmoil, I tried to formulate in my mind what I should say - how I should persuade this man who had never shown himself friendly to our work, to provide the wherewithal for its growth.

When I entered his office and was ushered into his private sanctum, there were others present. Confused and embarrassed, I asked if I might speak to him privately. He seemed annoyed and replied gruffly that if I had anything to say I might as well say it then and there. This took the wind out of my sails. I was so upset that the pretty speech which I had planned fled completely from my mind. Instead of being a tactful young lady, I blurted out:

"I want to buy a tabernacle."

He looked at me blankly. Then his gaze turned absently to his shelves. Frowning in bewilderment, he turned back to me and muttered,

"You want to buy what?"

I replied stoutly, concealing the despair in my heart,

"I want to buy a tabernacle."

In utter dismay, he stared at me and repeated slowly,

"And what in the world has that to do with me?"

Still scared stiff, but with the consciousness that this was God's errand that I was doing, I stammered,

"I want you to buy it for me!"

He looked at me in complete amazement with eyes as big as saucers and said,

"So...you want me to buy you a tabernacle!"

"Yes!" I replied.

After a long moment during which he stared at me as though I were crazy, he asked almost absent-mindedly,

"Where is this tabernacle?"

"On the west side of the city."

"And how much is it?" he asked.

"\$850."

There was a long pause, during which he shook his head several times, staring at me all the while as though I or he had taken leave of our senses. I was almost about to turn away when suddenly he snapped out;

“Go outside and get in the car!”

Once again, I was to witness the wheels of God in operation.

\* \* \*

As I look back over the way God had taken me, I am convinced afresh that “His callings are His enabling.” Over the years at every turn, I have stopped to make sure of God’s orders for my next step. When the need for expansion and extension of our modest little work into a more significant establishment first became evident, I was by no means convinced that it was really I whom God wished to lead the people further. In the back of my mind, there was always the thought, and, I am afraid I will have to confess, the hope that having gone this far, the Lord would relieve me and permit me to be just a wife and mother as I had originally intended. The ministry, I can assure you, was not my choice. It was always with an aching and bleeding heart that I left home, husband and children to do the will of God in public ministry. This crisis in the little congregation’s affairs was not the first time nor the last, when I felt that I was more wife and mother than a minister of the Lord - that my competence to do His work must be His decision, not mine.

So I asked for that decision with what was almost a challenge to God: If, as He seemed to assure me, I was to go forward in the ministry, He must provide the building and the wherewithal to carry on the work. So when this unwitting agent of the Lord bade me enter his car, and the implication was obvious that he had decided to consider helping us, I felt I had God’s answer to my challenge. Something was moving inside me of praise, resignation, and exuberance, as I witnessed the wheels of God’s workings again on the move.

\* \* \*

There was very little said between me and this stern, impassive business man as we drove toward the lumberyard where the little church was stored. I was afraid to say the wrong thing, to disturb whatever mood had led him to this action. I fancy he could not find words to explain his behavior to himself, let alone to me.

In due time, we arrived at the lumberyard and found the little church all set up. As I looked at it, immediately my heart went out to it. It seemed everything that one could imagine and wish for in a little church situated on the outskirts of the city. It had a vestibule and even a small

tower with pointed Gothic windows of colored glass. It reminded me, as I stood gazing longingly at it, of a cathedral in miniature.

Mr. Ed interrupted my reverie by asking, "Is this the building you want?" I returned an affirmative answer. After a pause, during which he looked at me searchingly, he again asked, more firmly, "Are you sure?" Again, I replied just as firmly as he did that I was sure.

He turned and again looked at the little church for a long moment. Then he drew a deep breath and murmured,

"Whom would one have to see to purchase this building?"

I replied that I presumed someone in the office of the lumberyard.

"And, how much did you say it was?"

I again repeated the figure of \$850. So over to the office we went. He questioned the man responsible for the sale of the building and found it to be as I had said. He then took a check from his pocket, a check already made out and signed by someone else. He endorsed the check and handed it to the man. I wondered about this check but, of course, said nothing.

After the business deal had been concluded, the necessary papers made out and signed, we took our departure. I struggled between mixed emotions of awe, joy, and wonder. As we drove along, he finally broke the silence.

"You don't know how lucky you were that I had that check. I tried to deposit it in the bank several times, but somehow always came home with it in my pocket."

I responded: "The fact that you had that check was known. God knew you had that check."

He said, with an odd expression, "What makes you say that?"

I then told him of my experience in prayer for three days, how God kept indicating this man to me in spite of my doubt and disbelief until I had no choice but to go to see him with my request. I saw that he was touched and amazed; and he said,

"But why would God send you to me, when I am living the way I am living?"

I told him that God, who knows the end from the beginning, knows that he is going to be saved, and that God was doing something in him, through him, and for him that possibly he would understand better down the road someday. A tear stole down his cheek, and we drove some way in silence. I knew that God was moving in his heart. After a while, he seemed struck by a sudden thought, and he asked me,

"Where are the lots you are going to move that building to?"

For a moment I was thunderstruck. Then covered with confusion and embarrassment, I felt myself sinking right into the seat next to him. I did not reply. I could not reply. But again, he asked;

“Where are the lots to which you intend moving the building?”

Finally, I found my voice - and a weak, small voice it was. I managed only to stammer,

“I...I never thought of...lots!”

His cheeks slowly suffused with red, and he said, unbelievably,

“You mean to say you had me buy you this building, and you have no place to put it?”

Again I had no reply.

The man drew the car up to the curb, stopped it, and turned to look at me sternly and yet in wonder. My mind was in turmoil. What was I to say to this man? What was I to say to the congregation? And, what was I to say to God?

Finally, I took a deep breath and said, with a mixture of defensiveness, defiance, and faith,

“Well... I am a woman, and probably I don't do things the way a man would do them. But I have obeyed God's leading, and though I have no money to buy lots, and don't know what I am going to do about lots. But I am sure God knows what He is going to do about lots!”

He stared at me a long moment, shook his head, and started the car again. As we pulled out into traffic, he continued to shake his head and say nothing. I was sure I had offended him and that he must think I had taken unfair advantage of him. I began to pray silently, “God help him not to be offended and for me not to say the wrong thing.”

After a long while as we drove along slowly, he stopped shaking his head, and finally he muttered,

“Well, you find two good lots, and I will buy them!”

I am sure that I must have been transfigured with thankfulness and joy. It was almost more than I could take. It was my turn to have a tear steal down my face. I saw again the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.



The Portable Church: to the right is the addition that was built the following year.